

WHITHER

DAWN POWELL

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WHITHER

BY
DAWN POWELL



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CHAPTER I

“AND here in the most delightful part of the house, my dear, with the river breeze and all, is a room—double, of course; one could not expect a single for the money!—for fifteen dollars. That includes dinner and breakfast, mind you—lovely hot rolls and coffee with one’s own choice of eggs or cereal! And such a charming girl occupying the other bed in the room! So lovely! Theatrical, you know. But a charming girl. Perfectly charming.”

“I’ll take it,” briefly interrupted the girl in the brown suit. A bit shabby, but—ah—nice, Mrs. Horne decided.

Mrs. Horne, taken aback by the suddenness of the deal, sat down sharply in a green wicker rocker by the pink-cretonned court window.

“Well, that’s that,” she sighed. She stiffened visibly, a frown on her forehead, and her ears alert.

The girl in the brown suit—she must be around twenty-one or so and probably the clever sort!—listened too. There was plainly a sound

of running water in the adjoining lavatory. Mrs. Horne compressed her lips and rose.

"It's that Maisie Colburn," she said irritably, a deepening scowl on her highly colored face. "She always leaves it running and then dashes off. She's to be your neighbor, Miss—Miss——"

"Bourne—Zoe Bourne," supplied the girl. She had good eyes, but heavens! Thin! That nervous, restless, eager, thin sort.

"Bourne. What a lovely name! Zoe Bourne. Yes, you will probably find Maisie a trial. She will share the lavatory with you. It connects the two rooms, you see. She leaves stockings soaking in it for days. She——" Here Mrs. Horne's frown lifted, and a fixed smile came to her lips. Zoe Bourne followed her gaze to the door where a sullen young negress stood, broom in hand.

"Yes, Clematia, what is it?" Mrs. Horne's voice was solicitous, almost tender.

"Mrs. Horne, I won't stand for no orders from them girls on the third floor. First Miss Robertson, she say for me to clean her room decent, and then——"

"Just a minute, Clematia. We'll talk it all over in the kitchen."

Mrs. Horne moved out heavily but with a certain dignity. She remembered the new lodger when she reached the door and flashed a brilliant smile over her shoulder. She even noted that

the brown coat was off now—such a shabby thing!—and the girl was sitting on the bed.

“Dinner at six, my dear, and please—please be on time. It upsets Clematia so to have the girls late.”

Her voice trailed off into a soothing, clucking murmur as she led her temperamental cook down the hall. She left in the room a suggestion of scented soap and vigorous perfume, which Zoe found oddly pleasant.

Zoe sat quite still on the bed after Mrs. Horne had left. She was a slender, brown, elfin thing, with slanting brown eyes and sooty lashes. Her hair, black and coarse as an Indian's, was cut short and clung in straggly wisps to her head. Zoe had bobbed it herself only the day before she came to New York. She had been a little disappointed in the result. When it had been long and done up in a more or less tidy knot at the nape of her neck, she had looked like an earnest young student or an assistant librarian. Bobbing it, she had thought to appear unacademic—even modish, whereas she had looked merely immature. Still, there was an inner feeling of tolerant sophistication which short hair gave one, and Zoe was glad, on the whole, that she had bobbed hers. It was the suitable gesture for a girl who was breaking off with her family and all the stupidities which Albon represented, for a career in New York.

New York!

It was hard to believe that she was truly here at last. Back in Albon at this moment her father and Tessie—Tessie was her stepmother—were continuing the maddening nagging they had begun the first thing in the morning. Perhaps Fred had just come in from the store and they were both scolding him for going around with that cheap factory girl. Fred was sullen because he dared not tell them he was going to marry the girl next month. He had told Zoe and Zoe had shrugged silently. It was just another thing to get away from. Harriet was hanging over the telephone, exchanging giggling gossip with some other high-school girl, probably the Paine girl, whose mother lived with that actor. And walling them all in together was the cruel, incessant nagging of Tessie and Father—plunging their words into each other as a vulture plunges its beak into the quivering entrails of an animal.

Zoe jumped up from the bed to break the memory.

New York!

She did not have over twenty dollars in the world, so she'd have to make good at once. Fifteen dollars was a lot of money to spend for one's board and lodging, even if there was a river breeze and a charming roommate. Fifteen dollars a week.

Zoe's eyes took in the room slowly.

It was a nice room. There were two green

wicker rockers, one at each side of the little oak desk at the window. The cretonne hangings at the window and the drapes over the chairs and bed were somewhat faded but still gallant. There were two long mirrors, too, each in a closet door. And a semi-private lavatory was practically as good as a private bath, Zoe reflected.

The roommate was theatrical and charming. Zoe wondered whether they would be friends. She had been frightfully lonesome in Albon. If one was respectable one had to belong to the crowd of respectable girls, that is to say girls whose fathers were able to send their children to college. And respectable, jolly girls were so fundamentally dumb. Yes, Zoe hoped her roommate would not be the wholesome sort.

She went to the large oak dresser and studied the belongings of her absent roommate. Fat jars of cold cream, slender vials of perfume and scented lotions and liquid powder, a bowl of Japanese crushed flowers, a flat crystal rouge-pot, a silver-framed photograph of a lieutenant in the marines, a wood-framed, oval snapshot of a young man in a bathing suit, a gray-enameled toilet set, a box of matches.

Zoe turned around and dropped to the bed again. She yawned. The long train journey had been tiring and she wanted her dinner, too. She kicked off her square little walking pumps and wondered idly whether she had time to take

a bath before dinner. Then the door opened and a girl came in.

She was tall, with a limp, luscious slenderness, and regally poised for the twenty-five years that she appeared to own. Her hat was off and Zoe's eyes were held by the mass of short, feathery amber curls that framed the exquisite face. Her eyes were amber, too, wide apart and slanting a little at the corners in a fascinating, Russian way. Her perfect lips were delicately emphasized by a tangerine rouge. Even her skin seemed to have a palely golden bloom like pollen on a peach.

"I'm Julie Dare," she said. "We're roommates, aren't we?"

Zoe had never seen any one so sleekly beautiful as this golden, gorgeous person. She nodded mutely, unable to speak before such divinity.

"I suppose Mrs. Horne has been asking about me?" Julie Dare moved over to her dressing table, and began brushing her short hair with slow, thorough strokes. "I'm back in my rent a few weeks and Mrs. Horne knows I've got a new contract and she's after me every minute."

"Is she pretty bad that way?" Zoe inquired, hypnotized by the languid, easy grace of the other girl.

"Well, I wouldn't say she was bad. When you run three or four months without an engagement, she never says a word about board. Loans you money, even. But as soon as you get into

something, then you pay and pay and pay. She doesn't give you a chance to buy as much as a camisole." She turned to Zoe from the dressing table. "You theatrical, too?"

"No."

"Good. I can't stand other actresses. Such a blamed nuisance telling lies all the time about the big contracts you've just turned down, and what a wonderful salary you're getting and how you have to fight the millionaires away from the stage door and all that. Hate actresses. Bunch of pikers, all of them. But they're not so bad as music students. Not musical, are you?" She paused in the act of applying a vast powder puff to her exquisite nose.

"No, I——"

"Fine. You'll get sick of them here. Mrs. Horne always takes in crowds of them. Always practicing or else showing their superior talents by criticizing the real people. Dinner is a mess. You wait. You say you just heard Heifetz or Chaliapin or Garden or anybody and—ah! The exchange of eyebrow lifting among the cultured music students! Frightful technique! Impossible G clefs! Wretched chest notes!" Julie lifted a shoulder scornfully. "That's about all study does to these ham artists. Just gives them the nerve to knock big people. Wait until you hear Enna. She lives across the hall and was taken by Witherspoon or Thorner in an unguarded moment."

Julie shot a glance at Zoe's vivid face through the mirror.

"Bored already, just hearing about them?" she questioned.

Zoe drew a long breath.

"No—thrilled. I—you see I've come from a town of mediocre people, all in mediocre professions. I think it's more fun being among mediocre artists than mediocre bookkeepers, don't you? Oh, I'm sure it is."

Julie absently drew her hair straight back, then frowning, pulled it forward again.

"Just letting it grow out," she explained. "I have to drag it back in this hideous, though I must say very Parisian, knot, or else fuzz it all over and put a net over it. You're in luck. Your type can wear bobbed hair for centuries and never be out of style. By the way, you'd better dress or you'll be late to dinner."

Zoe opened her suitcase, and drew out a brown georgette smock. She slid into it negligently and then ran her hands through her hair and shook it.

"Shall I wait for you?" she asked Julie, standing in the doorway and rather hoping Julie would want her to wait. She dreaded entering the dining room full of curious girls alone.

Julie, temporarily submerged by a slinky, black evening gown, made no reply. Finally her head appeared and two slim white arms and shoulders wriggled into place. She stared at

Zoe and Zoe was conscious of the difference in their dinner costumes.

"I never wear décolleté," she said quickly. "My shoulders are too thin. But yours are beautiful."

"It wouldn't suit you, I think," Julie studied her for a moment with detached interest. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-two." Zoe's voice was wistful, as if twenty-two years was a long time to wait for a dream. Julie looked at her and turned away.

"I'm twenty-three," she said with a certain defiance. Zoe was embarrassed by the impression that she was lying.

The dining room was on the lower floor and Zoe, who had understood that Mrs. Horne kept only students and artists, was struck by the variety of ages represented by the few girls who had regarded Clematia's wishes and arrived at the table on time. Some were even fifty—white-haired. Yet they, also, were talking eagerly of "prospects." Most of them were around Julie's age—an indefinable age, it seemed to Zoe—a sort of petrified twenty-three.

Julie pointed Zoe to an empty place and made her way to her own place at another table, where Zoe could hear her quick, throaty voice dominating the conversation, not aggressively, but with a certain sophisticated assurance. Everything that happened in Julie's everyday routine was

apparently a matter of the utmost significance. The shower that ruined her green hat, the conductor who addressed her in Italian, the shop girl who gave her the wrong change. Every one hung on her words, for the girl seemed to clothe everything she said with such glamour that it attained an importance out of all proportion.

"Julie's at it again," Zoe heard a voice at her elbow breathe and turned to see a small, childish-faced little person occupying herself with an enormous helping of food. She looked up apologetically at Zoe.

"You could have a double portion, too, if you give Clematia perfume," she whispered. "I've got to have it on account of my art."

Here she giggled broadly, and Zoe recognized her as unadulterated gamin, from the sandy hair to the little, freckled, upturned nose, and wide, red mouth.

"What is your art?" she asked.

"Filing," giggled the gamin, not deterred by her mirth from putting a vast forkful of food into her mouth. "I file in an advertising agency. The girls think it's terrible. Julie says I ought to have a career, but I'll take a job any day. Let the folks have careers who don't have to support themselves."

"What career did Julie suggest for you?" Zoe was interested.

The gamin shrugged her small shoulders carelessly.

"Oh, any kind. They're all the same. From what I see, I gather that a career means going around hunting for a job. I'm the only person here, I guess, that works. All the rest of the girls have careers. Some of them have had them seven or eight years, too. That old lady at the next table has been waiting thirty years for Ethel Barrymore to die. Won't take anything but the best and so she's never set foot on the stage. She teaches elocution or something once a week, while she waits."

The gamin laughed frankly at her own humor and then appraised Zoe keenly.

"What are you going to do here? Sketch?"

"I want to get on a magazine or newspaper." Zoe warmed to the business of discussing her own self. "Of course some day I want to be a great writer—a playwright, I think. But that takes a long time, so I'd like to get on some paper for a little while. I'm afraid I can't afford to wait for what I really want, though. I'll have to take something quick or—or—go back home."

"Excelsior!" applauded the gamin, still applying herself ferociously to her food. "The doors are open to ambitious young folks. Only some are marked 'exit.' You live with Julie, don't you? I heard you in there just before dinner."

"Then you're Maisie Colburn?" guessed Zoe, and Maisie nodded, silenced for the instant by her gorging.

Zoe liked Maisie. It was fun, of course, being

among actresses and artists, but it was a relief to find an ordinary being in the lot. She looked around the dining room with its four tables of chattering girls, trying to analyze the queer facial expression that seemed common to all—to all of them except the girl beside her.

"It's probably just the metropolitan, sophisticated look," Zoe thought, yet she wrinkled her brows perplexedly. There was something vaguely disturbing about this singular group-personality, its enameled vivacity, its eagerness that seemed strained and oddly cynical.

"What do you think of the gang?" queried Maisie, now courting an unpalatable-looking pudding.

"Interesting," murmured Zoe. "I—I was just wondering if they were as young as they looked."

"Uh-uh," negatived Maisie. "No matter how old you think they are, they're all older than that. Funny?"

CHAPTER II

ZOE left the dining room with Maisie. She realized, then, that she need have felt no embarrassment about entering it alone, for although Mrs. Horne's entourage consisted of not more than twenty girls, she had not attracted the slightest attention as a newcomer. Indeed, no newcomer ever did in this household. This was no boarding-school group, eager for new thrills and new people, but a group of individuals, each engrossed in her own absorbingly egotistical affairs, ignoring everything new or old which did not fit into her set plan of life.

Julie glanced up as Zoe and Maisie were leaving and frowned delicately.

"Wonder what she's here for?" she speculated aloud, and then explained further to the flamboyantly hennaed and mascaraed person on her left. "New roommate, there, just going out with Maisie Colburn. She's too short for me, though."

Across the table a faded spinster of fifty laughed.

"Miss Tait doesn't get the connection between heights and roommates," the mascaraed person said. "Julie means she won't get any new clothes out of the deal. Still, Julie, you man-

age awfully well with Enna's things and she's smaller than you."

"Oh, yes, furs and gloves and stockings and hats and things like that," admitted Julie. "But I need a new street suit and a couple of dinner gowns. I've got a new man coming to town whose sole interest in me is the fact that I am an actress. He's from Kansas City. So I have to look the part and I want to know how I can look like a wicked woman when I have to wear the same thing every time I go out with him. If this girl only had something giddy looking. But no. She goes in for Buster Brown collars and smocks and sport shoes and wool stockings and mufflers. You have to admit that it's not the outfit to make one look like a vamp."

Amy Bruce looked at Julie with covert envy. Of all the girls in the house Julie's charms found the most admirers and it was in Amy's mind that a Buster Brown collar would be quite as seductive on Julie as a jet shoulder-strap on anybody else. In fact, Amy had earnestly striven, since her arrival at Mrs. Horne's seven years ago, to make herself as much like Julie as possible. She unconsciously caricatured each of Julie's little tricks of manner and dress. She let her hair grow in the style of Julie's blond shock, but Amy's coarse hair, fuzzed into a semblance of Julie's, only looked unbelievably vulgar.

Julie patted her own hair absently.

"Guess I'd better get dressed. Seven o'clock."

"Date tonight?" Amy's voice was envious, and Miss Tait's mouth twisted sourly.

"And I'm dead tired, too," sighed Julie. "Rehearsed all day long."

"Enna said you only had four lines," Amy caught her up maliciously. Amy, too, went in for the theater, but she belonged to the unlucky masses who never get past the agent's contemptuous promises. In Amy's seven years of trying she had never gotten nearer success than the first rehearsal.

"She did? A lot Enna knows about it," Julie snapped. "I said it was only a few lines considering it was the lead."

Julie's eyes defied any retort and she left the table with casual dignity. At another table she paused and, after summoning a friendly smile, leaned over toward a smoothly coiffed, thin-faced girl in tortoise-shell glasses.

"Enna, dear, I have to dash out tonight and my new coat hasn't come from the tailor's. I'm perfectly furious about it, of course. Isn't that always the way?"

Enna, who knew perfectly well what her part should be in this transparent little masquerade, did not bite. She looked up with a hostile gleam.

"It may be delivered yet."

"Oh, no, it couldn't possibly come now. It's—you see it's from Hickson's and they never send out anything after two in the afternoon."

Enna was disposed to continue the battle.

"Why, Julie, I've had things sent from Hickson's at eight in the evening. You're sure it was Hickson's, Julie?"

This was being downright nasty, but Julie, being a suppliant, merely ground her teeth and forced a smile.

"There's only one Hickson's, Enna. It seems awfully odd that they should have different rules for different people. But then you probably got your things there several seasons ago. I was only wondering if you were wearing your gray coat tonight. I would be careful of it, of course."

Enna's face did not change its expression.

"I'd be glad to let you have it, Julie. I'm not wearing it tonight as you know. But my rule is 'Never borrow, never lend.' So sorry."

"That's all right," murmured Julie, her face flushed with irritation. "It just occurred to me."

She went thoughtfully upstairs to her own bedroom, where the new roommate and Maisie Colburn sat exchanging superficial impressions of Mrs. Horne.

"But you ought to see her alone in her bedroom at night. She smokes cigarettes ten inches long, one right after the other," Maisie solemnly averred. "And yet to see that wonderful bedside manner, when she speaks of her dear girls, you'd never—— What's the matter, Julie? Haven't been bit by an asp, old dear, have you?"

Julie's pink-gold face was temporarily an angry scarlet. She tossed her short, blond hair like a nettled thoroughbred and began silently to repair the damages which dining always does to the most artfully designed lips. Zoe watched curiously and Maisie with avid delight, while Julie delicately rouged her ear lobes, the cleft in her chin and the lids of her eyes. Then she selected one of four small vials of perfume and with a tiny glass dropper put a suggestion on her hair, another on her chin, on her throat, and as a final triumph, on the palms of her hands.

"Julie, you're wonderful!" exclaimed Maisie, with a long sigh of admiration. She turned to Zoe. "I've watched her do it for two years, and she always does it exactly the same way. And you know, Julie, you never, never, never have put it on your hands first. It's always the last rite."

Julie's vanity was aroused and her irritation at Enna forgotten. She began humming softly as she dived in the closet for a silver and lace hat.

"This hat is as old as that rite, Maisie," she grumbled. She lifted it high above her head and then slid it on her yellow hair, carefully gauging the correct angle from her mirror. In the long, black, clinging gown, with the big, drooping hat slightly aslant, she looked incredibly alluring. She scowled, however, at her image in the mirror. Then she went to the door and looked out.

Reassured, she left the room. Zoe looked at Maisie inquiringly.

"Going to swipe Enna's coat," said Maisie comfortably. "She always does. Enna might as well let her have it in the first place."

Julie returned with a black lace and chiffon evening cloak, which she flung swiftly over her white shoulders.

"I didn't dare take the gray one, because she knew I wanted it. I just took this out of a suit box on the closet shelf. Isn't it gorgeous and isn't she a pig, anyway?"

Zoe breathed her admiration. She had never dreamed that girls outside of fiction could be so beautiful as Julie.

"I can't imagine it being made for any one but you."

Julie beamed.

"I'd better go down now, before she comes up to her room," she meditated aloud. "I'll have to take a taxi, too. Got any money, Maisie?"

Maisie went silently to her room and returned with two dollar bills.

"It's the funniest thing," Julie informed Zoe. "Maisie makes eighteen dollars a week, not a third of the salary or allowance of any other girl in the house. And yet she's the only one who always has money to lend. All the rest of us are always broke. You're never broke, are you, Maisie?"

"On Fridays," Maisie confessed. "But when

I'm broke, I just do without and the rest of you never think of doing that. F'instance, last Friday I was broke so I walked down to Twenty-fourth Street to the office and walked home. And I swiped an extra roll from the breakfast tray for my lunch. See? And I've got a cheap room, besides."

Zoe was occupied with another thought.

"Will the man call for you here?" she asked Julie.

Julie shrugged.

"Heavens, no. New York men meet you at some hotel and you have to scramble down there the best way you can. If you haven't the price of a taxi, you have to go down in evening clothes on the subway . . . and believe me, they always pick the hotel that's most convenient to them."

"Then you dance there?" Zoe was eager to find out all the secrets of the gay metropolitan life. Soon, perhaps, she would be going out like that, too.

"Hah!" jeered Julie. "Not your New York man. You meet him inside the swinging doors and swing right out again to the street and go some place where there's no cover charge. And he asks you if you'll have lemon punch. Then you each have lemon punch and make it last for five or six dances. Then you get another one."

"But Alphonse isn't that way, Julie," Maisie reminded her. "You said Alphonse spends lots of money. So does Fred."

"Fred's like all the Middle Westerners," Julie scorned. "He's so afraid he won't act like a New Yorker that he acts just like Kansas City. Throws his money around and everything. Not that I care. As for Alphonse . . . well, South Americans are always liberal, I believe, except to their wives. But I can't go out with him much now, because I've just gotten engaged to Fred."

Maisie giggled.

"He's the seventh this year. You know you'll never marry him, Julie."

Julie looked aggrieved.

"I certainly will. You girls make me furious. I don't know why a girl can't change her mind, if she finds some one she likes better. I've just made a few mistakes, that's all. I'm simply mad about Fred. I'll marry him the minute I get back from this tour, but one's career comes first."

With this reproof, Julie sailed out of the room, Enna's lace cloak floating about her in filmy luxury.

"I wonder if she ever will marry any of them," Maisie chuckled, her square little fingers interlocked behind her sandy head, and her skinny little person twisted in one of the green rockers. "She ought to. She's such a rotten actress."

Zoe was surprised.

"They all are," Maisie declared. "They don't want to do anything that isn't important, for one thing, and for another they never forget who

they are and that this is their great opportunity. Once in a while one of the girls gets in something and a few of us faithful ones trot over to New Haven or Atlantic City to see it open and it's always the same. Our delegate is so afraid she'll lose herself in the part that she's terrible. Walks on eggs and uses her stage laughter that she learned of the elocution teacher back home. Like this—Ha—Ha—Ha.” Maisie imitated the Broadway idea of cultured merriment. “Makes me sick, honestly it does. And they all think they are so good, you know.”

“But Julie would make a great actress, surely,” Zoe said.

Maisie shook her head.

“Amy Bruce could, because she's got—well, I don't know, but she could forget how she looked long enough to play a part, I'll bet. But she looks like a street-walker, and now managers don't like that type. Did you say you wanted to go on the stage?”

Zoe hurriedly denied the charge.

“I thought you looked a little too bright,” reflected Maisie. “Oh, yes, you were going to be a novelist or a magazine writer or something. If I were you, I'd forget all that stuff, and get a good filing job some place. Down at my office, maybe. I could get you in.”

“Oh, no,” shuddered Zoe. “That sounds just like Albon. I've made up my mind to have a literary career in New York, and I—well, I

simply couldn't file. Of course, if it came to starvation——"

"Go ahead with your magazines," advised Maisie. "I just mentioned the filing job, because I thought you might need the money right away. Why don't you talk to May Roberts? She's a writer. Very successful, too, they say. We'll run up there, and she'll tell you where to go."

Maisie and Zoe found May Roberts in the midst of creation.

She had one of the tiny maids' rooms on the attic floor and its alarming confusion gave it the appearance of being scarcely big enough for a dog kennel. An evening dress worn a fortnight ago hung over a chair, and on an outspread newspaper beneath it a pair of shoes and a bottle of shoe polish rested. The bed was almost obscured by a mass of hat boxes, newspapers, half-sorted laundry and dresses.

At the writing table sat May, a large, prematurely gray person of about thirty-four. She was working on a small portable typewriter, absently shoving the débris on the table with her elbow, as the need arose for more space for her manuscript. Papers, stamps, combs and brushes, an electric curler, fruit, gloves, veils, hairpins and two or three bottles of ink rioted over the table except for the small clearing where her typewriter sat.

"Busy, May?" Maisie demanded cheerily from the doorway. Zoe drew back hesitantly. The author was probably in the midst of a novel and certainly would not feel like giving advice to an aspiring young writer at this critical moment.

May looked up in obvious irritation.

"What do you want?" she asked, ungraciously.

Maisie indicated Zoe with her thumb.

"She wants to hear how you became a successful author. You know—how to get a job on the magazines and work up to fame."

Zoe was surprised to see May's face light up miraculously.

"Certainly. Come on in and sit down. I'm just finishing up an article for the *Sun*, but it doesn't have to be in till tomorrow."

"What I want to know," Maisie burst out irrepressibly with the thought which Zoe had had, "is how you can write in all this mess. Couldn't you write better if you took about five minutes every morning and made a clearing?"

May considered this without resentment.

"Yes," she agreed, "I suppose I could. But if I cleaned things up first, I would be in too virtuous a mood to write. I'd want to sit and congratulate myself."

Maisie shook her head hopelessly at this manifestation of temperament and then care-

fully sat down on the floor. Zoe removed the evening dress from the chair and sat down.

"You've got a lot of work coming to you if you want to write," May began, leaning back in her chair and eying Zoe severely. "I've been making a living at it for four years now, and let me tell you I work like a slave. I'm at it night and day. But now I've got to the place where I'm recognized, where I can get better pay for my stuff."

Zoe wished she had found out more about Miss Roberts's work before she called.

"That doesn't mean I have to work any the less, mind you." May was enjoying herself in the rôle of the successful author giving advice to the novice. "This week I've written nearly thirty thousand words."

"Is it a novel?" shyly asked Zoe.

May stared.

"Heaven forbid," she sputtered. "A novel? Good Lord. Whatever put that in your head? Syndicate stuff is my line. Fashions, household hints, little poems, jokes, trade suggestions—everything."

"Not even any short stories?" Zoe clung weakly to her idea of what an author should be.

"I haven't the physique," dryly answered May. "I tried it once but—— Ever see any of my stuff? I'm Johanna Jewell for the syndicates and Henry France for the trade magazines.

I might give you a letter to the editor of the 'Dry Goods Economist'."

Zoe's face plainly and tactlessly revealed her disgust at the idea. May, seeing this, twisted her mouth sarcastically.

"You may as well get this big literary idea out of your head right away, unless you've got enough capital to support it. If you want to earn a living writing, you've got to write selling stuff. You'll save yourself a lot of hard knocks if you start in doing it right away."

"I'd thought of writing plays," faltered Zoe. "I wanted to do something in a big way."

"You didn't want to do anything big," May said in a hard, contemptuous voice. "You're just like all the rest of them. You just want to *be* something big. There's a difference. You don't want to do anything. None of you would do a stroke of work to get the thing you think you want. You're all too big for that." She laughed sardonically. "I may be nothing but a hack—that's what you think, I can tell—but let me tell you I think it's a damned sight more artistic to be a good hack than to be a bum artist waiting for the moon to drop."

She glared at Zoe and Maisie and Zoe stared back, open-mouthed, unconscious of having given cause for such an outburst.

"I've got to get out of this place," May went on abruptly. "I'm going to the Bronx or to Brooklyn, where I won't be constantly aggra-

vated by the sight of you would-be artists floating around trying to dodge work. I don't mean to be personal, Miss —— whatever your name is, but the best thing for you to do is to get this big stuff idea out of your head and go hunt for a job. If you're a born genius, you'll go some place and starve and write, but you don't look that kind. You want baths and nice neighborhoods and decent friends and salads and beaux and orchestra seats in the theater more than you want to write plays." She held up her hand as Zoe started to protest. "It's nothing against you. Only why kid yourself into thinking you're an artist when you're just a bright girl out looking for thrills? You look clever enough and you might get on some trade paper or in a publicity office. That's the best advice I can give you."

Zoe, burning with resentment, murmured incoherent thanks. She'd show May Roberts and the whole world! She would write great, wonderful plays like "Hedda Gabler." She would starve, and when the play was done she would fall in a swoon from her privations for art's sake. Her hair would turn gray prematurely and she would become a literary nun, her life consecrated to her work. She shuddered involuntarily at the thought.

"Never mind," Maisie consoled her, as they went downstairs. "Nasty old May. Didn't think she'd jump on you like that. Anyway there's always the filing job in my office."

Zoe felt sick with discouragement. What if her money should give out and she'd have to be a reporter for a trade paper or a file clerk—those things May suggested as inevitable?

CHAPTER III

ONE evening Zoe was lying down on her bed after dinner, trying vainly to fix her thoughts on the book she had in her hand. Julie was out, of course, this time with a visitor from Detroit, her fiancé having been put off with some frail excuse. Maisie, the cheerful little cynic, had gone out to take in her weekly movie with one of the gushing little art students on the third floor.

Zoe felt poignantly lonely—the loneliness that comes to solitary souls in great cities, always the more devastating because of the contrasting gayety of the millions of others so near. It had been a hard day, too, down at the advertising office. Grinding routine, in spite of Maisie's ironic little murmurs of encouragement.

"If I had had to do filing like that back home, I would have died," Zoe ruminated, "The Tree of Heaven" falling from her fingers. "I don't see why I have to do it in New York—well, of course, my board has to be paid. And I never, never would have been taken on as an editor. People are so nasty about experience and degrees and things."

She closed her tired eyes, and pressed her fingers against them. There were little blue patches under her eyes and drawn lines about

her mouth. Somehow a deadly routine job—filing, filing, filing, all day long—seemed to sap all of one's enthusiasm. But perhaps it was too presumptuous to hope that one might earn a living at something thrilling and agreeable. Perhaps people never did enjoy their work.

"I'll have to stick at this old job until after Christmas, anyway," Zoe mused. "That's five months off. Then perhaps I'll have some money saved and can start doing something real. But maybe I could stand this job better if I could have excitement every night the way Julie does, and suitors and dances, and pretty clothes, and things like that——"

The door opened and Enna, in kimono and curl papers, came in.

"I'm going to a big party at the Ritz tomorrow night," Enna hastened to explain her negligence, "and I'm resting tonight, as you see, in order to be in good shape for it. Julie's out, I suppose?"

Zoe nodded wearily, amused at the remembrance of Julie in Enna's best Paris hat. What Enna did with such handsome clothes was a mystery to every one in the house, for her New England face and character belied all craving for material show. It was generally understood, through Clematia, that Enna's mother was a wealthy Bostonian who showered elaborate gifts on Enna to make up for her neglect in other respects.

"Traveling on the continent, wintering in Spain, and cruising on the Mediterranean in summer," Julie had informed Zoe. "Having a fine time without her lemon of a daughter to cramp her activities. Enna's clothes simply represent an erring mother's conscience. And Enna knows it, too. That's why you never hear a peep about gay Mama, but always about dear Aunt Sophronia in Providence. Mama would get a good laugh, though, if she could see her dutiful daughter with that little black French hat stuck on the back of her head like a sun-bonnet."

Now Zoe looked at Enna with a certain detached sympathy. The girl probably felt the situation rather deeply. Still, it was difficult to believe that there was any thought behind Enna's smug little face that did not yield the utmost satisfaction to herself.

"Anything you wanted?" Zoe tumbled into a sitting posture.

"No," said Enna, seating herself gingerly on the arm of a chair. "I only wanted to know the name of the night cream that Julie depends on for her complexion. I thought I'd send out for some."

Zoe did not know and Enna examined the jars and vials on Julie's dresser with absorbed interest. She tried the perfume.

"Night of Love—I must remember that. Wonder what Julie paid for it. Ah, here's the

cream." She dabbed a little on her hand, and smelled it cautiously, as if, Zoe thought, there might be black magic in it. Then she took a little more and rubbed it on her face, looking in the mirror hopefully, doubtless expecting to change at once into Beauty. "That's what I want. I wonder what Julie would do without her little beauty aids. She leaves you alone a great deal, doesn't she? It's a wonder she wouldn't take you, at least, on some of her parties."

Zoe laughed grimly.

"She can't take me until I get some clothes that make me look less provincial."

"She has asked you, then?"

Zoe nodded.

"Often. I'm looking forward to going, but one doesn't want to look like a maid or poor relation. Julie always looks so gorgeous." She stopped suddenly, realizing that half of Julie's gorgeousness was due to her present guest's fine wardrobe.

"Anybody home?" a voice in the hall called. Enna froze.

"It's that Amy Bruce. She's coming in here. I'll go."

Amy Bruce came in, her hair dazzlingly marceled and freshly hennaed, her eyelashes newly mascaraed, her lips garishly red and her eyelids rouged after Julie's fashion. She wore a blue duvetyn dress that permitted an amazing view of her bosom, although it could scarcely be

termed a dinner gown. Her hose, sheerer even than Julie's cobwebby stockings, accentuated ankles and legs that had better been left unrevealed. She gave Enna a veiled smile and looked at Zoe.

"I have to go up to the drug store and get some powder. Anybody want to walk up and get a frosted chocolate? It's only nine o'clock."

"Heavens, no!" Enna shuddered. "I loathe that drug store. Besides I'm going to bed in order to get a good rest. You see there is this big party at the Ritz tomorrow night——"

"Ho, ho!" laughed Amy loudly. "Yes, I thought of going to that, myself."

"This is a party given by a dear friend of mine—Alice Bradley," maintained Enna, angry at Amy's incredulity. "Just because you have no respectable friends in New York, you seem to think——"

"There, there, Enna," soothed Amy, mockingly. "Of course her is going to the Ritz with her swell little friend. Maybe Mrs. Hunter Bradley herself will be there to welcome little Enna."

"That's Alice's mother!" exclaimed Enna, and Amy burst into peals of appreciative laughter.

"Oh, Enna, you're good. Didn't know you had it in you." She turned to Zoe. "Well, you're not preparing for the Ritz, are you? Come on out. I hate to go alone."

Enna stalked from the room in thoroughly

justifiable rage at having her modest announcement taken as plain bragging. Her glare at the doorway included Zoe, who could not help but laugh.

"Old prude," sniffed Amy. She took in Zoe with her large dark eyes. "Why don't you slip on Julie's sport coat? You'd look good in it. I imagine red is your color, isn't it? Julie wouldn't care if you wore it."

Zoe, who had been in the act of putting on her brown suit coat, hesitated.

"Why, I hardly think she'd care. And I do get so sick of this old brown thing. Do you think it will fit me?"

The red coat was found and enveloped Zoe's slender little figure without revealing that its original owner was somewhat larger in size.

Amy disappeared for her own hat and gloves and they left the house a moment later, walking arm in arm down Eighty-third Street to Broadway. Amy, to Zoe's amazement, had dashed on even more lipstick and Zoe felt uncomfortable at the knowing looks which the men they met cast at Amy. But Amy laughed enjoyably.

"Guess we're a pair, Zoe. Do you mind if I call you Zoe? And you call me Amy. Notice how everybody takes us in? That red coat just sets you off great. If I were you, I'd trade in something with Julie for it. She hardly ever wears it. She got it when she was running around with some Princeton boys and wanted to

look like a flapper. Now that she goes in for vamp stuff, she never wears it."

Zoe felt a thrill of adventure, now that her first distrust of her companion had evaporated. The night air, with the river breeze, was invigorating; the lights of Broadway gayly inviting, and Amy, her perfume as obvious as the rest of her, seemed to exude with it a secret anticipation of pleasure. At Broadway they had passed Evart's Drug Store before Zoe called Amy's attention to it.

"Plenty more shops up Broadway. Powder can wait. Let's take a walk," said Amy. She tucked Zoe's slim brown fingers under her arm, and led her toward the curb.

"Fellows don't pay any attention to you from the machines unless you're by the curb," she explained. "And sometimes you see somebody you know, too—or maybe that you'd like to. Say, did you see those three fellows in that Cadillac that just passed? Look! They're turning around."

"Oh—Oh." Zoe's thumping heart choked her. This was adventure, sure enough, but there was almost too much danger in it for enjoyment. Amy's eyes were dancing with fun. She glanced over her shoulder.

"Come. Don't look around, because I can see them all right. Trust little Amy. . . . Darn . . . They didn't look that time at all. . . . Wait . . . Oh, I see. . . . They're after those

three girls up there in front of the Adelphi. Isn't that rich? Wonderful car, too, isn't it? Everybody seems to be out tonight."

Zoe stole a curious glance at Amy. Her companion was enjoying herself to the utmost. Her eyes were alight with the joys of the hunt and her feet were fairly dancing. She was humming, not too softly, one of the jazziest of the latest jazz tunes. Men looked at her and their eyes traveled to Zoe, too. She felt elated. This now, was New York!

"Keep your eye out, honey," said Amy. "We don't want to let anything get past. I've got my eye on the machines. . . . Say, wouldn't it be slick if we'd meet a couple o' fellows who'd take us out to Blossom Heath or—but, let's not be too particular!"

She laughed and an older man, standing in the door of a cigar store, looked at Zoe and winked. Zoe laughed, too, in sheer abandonment.

"Wait. . . . Look at this hat. You'd look stunning in that hat, Zoe. You need a dash of color, you know. You've no idea how every one stares at you in that red coat."

Zoe, catching sight of her borrowed plumes in a shop-window mirror, was astonished at herself. Her slim, olive face was fiery red and the red coat made her eyes look wide and as bold as Amy's own. The sight, somehow, brought her to a startled halt. But Amy was nudging her and whispering in her ear.

"Pretend we're looking at this hat. . . . Isn't it pretty? Cheap, too, I believe. Not more than thirty at the most. I think I'll go in now and get it."

"Yes." Zoe's tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth with the consciousness that she must somehow play up. "It's very nice—it—it——"

"Yes, isn't it?" giggled Amy. She took Zoe's arm firmly and started in the store.

"Oh, no," said Zoe. "You're not really going to get it?"

"Tonight? Well, if you are in such a hurry to get those earrings, I suppose I can wait until tomorrow." Here Amy's gaze wandered vaguely off to the two men who were standing at the other window of the shop. The men stared at Amy and then at Zoe.

"I'm pretty good at picking earrings." The younger man, a short, rotund person in a vivid topcoat, pretended to address his companion, a tall, well-tailored man with keen, dark eyes. "How about you, Chuck?"

"Earrings are my specialty," affirmed the other, his eye deliberately measuring Amy's obvious charms against Zoe's subtler ones.

"We don't need any advice about that," Amy said, taking Zoe's arm and walking away in mock dignity. "If we did, we'd ask for it."

"Ho! Aren't we the fresh guys!" mocked the younger man, lighting a cigarette, but keeping his eye on Zoe.

Zoe, for her part, was not at all sure what Amy's idea was, for that lady had suddenly stopped in her feigned flight and pretended to have difficulty with a shoe string. The two men came up and the younger one caught Amy's arm as she arose.

"I say, how about a little ride? That's our boat, there, the green one."

Zoe saw a green touring car at the curb and saw Amy swiftly taking in the same thing.

"If you'll let me drive," laughed Amy, her eye catching Zoe's triumphantly.

"We shall see what we shall see."

Zoe found herself in the front seat of the machine, while the older man took his place beside her at the wheel. Her eyes sparkled, her heart beat with excitement and the thrill of danger, but she was speechless. What did one talk about to a man met in this fashion? The car slid down the street and up Broadway. She could hear Amy bantering with "George" in the back seat, as they whirled up Broadway through the nineties and early hundreds.

"Pelham Heath?" questioned Chuck, negligently.

"I'd love it," cried Zoe.

Her companion looked down at her with indifferent curiosity. Zoe, catching his eye, hoped that he liked her. He did act rather bored, though. In the back seat, Amy and George appeared to have struck up a most amiable rela-

tionship, and Chuck, after a while, addressed his conversation chiefly to them.

They spun through Bronx Park and out toward the popular road house which was their destination. Zoe studied her companion covertly. Such an absence of intellectuality fascinated her. She wondered what he thought about. He did have an intelligent face, in a way, but his remarks were exactly of the kind young Albon blades made. His manner, however, was distinctly of Broadway, a sophisticated condescension, a blasé assurance.

"Yes, theatrical," Zoe heard Amy answering some question that George had put. "Just finished an engagement in Boston and I'm resting up. . . . You don't know of any manager that wants a leading lady, do you?"

This was said in laughter, but it was clear that Amy never missed a possible bet.

"I'm in the business, myself," Chuck threw over his shoulder suddenly. "Call at my office and I'll see what we can do. Musical comedy?"

"No," said Amy, with equal sang-froid, "drama. I'd like to have a look at this office of yours. Where is it—Bryant Park?"

"The lobby of the Hotel Algonquin," laughed George.

"Broadway and Thirty-seventh—Morrel and Levy," said Chuck, without taking his eyes from the road. Zoe could tell from Amy's stunned silence that she was impressed at last.

"I'll be around tomorrow," Amy retorted, after a pause, and then began a boisterous conversation with George. Zoe, who now felt stiff and out of place in the party, wished that she was going on the stage, too. It was depressing to think of the dull routine of office work. Besides, Amy's confessed propensities seemed to surround her with a glamorous charm, and Zoe felt envious of the attention which both men gave to her. It's much worse, she thought, being neglected by dull men than by nice men.

They came within sight of the glittering road house, sitting in the midst of a golden-lit circle fringed with limousines and taxicabs. Once inside, it seemed to Zoe a fantastic mingling of brilliant lights, waiters' white shirt fronts, intoxicating jazz music and syncopated couples. She was dazzled by its gayety. There was dancing with Chuck and dancing with adipose George, whose faintly quizzical eyes made her uncomfortable. Amy, her hennaed head comfortably resting on one or the other man's shoulder, her black eyes fastened boldly on her partner, and her whole body abandoned to the dance, would occasionally flash a triumphant glance at Zoe, which Zoe interpreted as "We landed pretty this time, thanks to me!"

This—yes, this was New York! She must get used to this strange whirl.

Back at Mrs. Horne's about midnight, Zoe came flying into her room, leaving Amy down on

the street making some obscure negotiations with the escorts, which Zoe suspected did not concern her. Julie was sitting on her bed, cold-creaming her face for the night. She nodded at Zoe's explanation of the red coat, but she whistled softly when Zoe incoherently outlined her evening.

"Out with Amy Bruce?" she said, thoughtfully. "Better go a little easy with her, Zoe. She might have got you into a nice mess, because she doesn't care what happens so long as it's exciting. It's just pure luck that those fellows were even decent. Glad you had a good time, though. I didn't know you were that much of a gambler. These motor flirtations aren't always such simple little affairs."

"I suppose it was gambling," agreed Zoe from the lavatory where she was giving herself a desultory scrubbing. The thrill of a few hours before was gone. Now she felt vaguely nauseated, remembering the trip coming home. Once she had looked around and was staggered to see George and Amy locked in each other's arms. Why, Amy and George had never seen each other before! Suddenly the adventure changed. It was not a scarlet patch of New York—the strange, whirling city she had come to discover, but a cheap, sordid thing. Zoe had felt hot and ashamed the rest of the way home. She told herself she should be flattered that the other three did not consider her one of them, but she

wasn't. The fact only deepened her humiliation.

"Where did you go?" Zoe asked after a moment.

"Theater," laconically answered Julie. "Fred followed us and started making a scene right outside the Ambassador Grill. I simply handed him his ring and we walked on out, leaving him gasping there."

"Julie! You didn't! What did you do then?"

"Jack and I taxied to the theater and got engaged. We're going to pick out an apartment tomorrow. Really, Zoe, he's—sweet."

Zoe murmured felicitations. If men in New York didn't like her any better than Chuck had, she certainly would never be engaged.

CHAPTER IV

ZOE had been filing letters for a full four hours and her eyes had been flying to the big clock intermittently for the last half hour. Maisie had had the good fortune to be sent on some mission up to the Bronx and had confided to Zoe, as she went out, that she hadn't the slightest intention of coming back to the office that afternoon. It was five now and Maisie had kept her word. Zoe pictured her up at Mrs. Horne's, in her funny little brown kimono, having an orgy of laundry work.

In the copywriters' room, Zoe could see the men already leaving for the night, with the exception of that blue-eyed Mr. Cornell, who always stayed overtime. Zoe had a suspicion that he was one of those hundred per cent American go-getters that one read about in the success magazines, but he was good looking enough to be forgiven for it. He was leaning over his desk and in front of him was a jar of cold cream which appeared to be the object of the most profound consideration.

Two stenographers came through the filing room with their hand towels and vanity cases, en route for the wash room for the five o'clock dolling up. Zoe herself shook her hair back,

yawned thoroughly, and pushed the contents of the filing basket into her top drawer. She glanced at her image in the small, cracked mirror above the file cabinets. Blue shadows under her eyes! Tired mouth! Heavens, she was getting old. Those stenographers were just as near twenty-three as she was, yet they did manage to look like the most irresponsible of flappers. They came in now to stick their ridiculous little sport hats on top of their bobbed hair which stuck out straight from their heads. A little more lipstick and then they draped their orange and scarlet scarves about their necks, over the short, flaring overcoats, and they were off with a murmured good night.

Zoe was about to pull her tam o'shanter on her vivid black hair when a masculine head was thrust out of Mr. Bergman's—the president's—office. It was Mr. Kane, the art director and Mr. Bergman's councilor. According to Maisie, he was a queer sort who hated business but seemed to be a natural-born genius in advertising.

"Probably won't stay with us long," Maisie had said. "One of these birds that hops in and puts a business on its well-known feet and then hops out again. Old Bergman nurses him along like a hothouse plant."

"I say, don't go yet, please," he called, hesitantly, at sight of Zoe. "I want you for just a moment here."

Zoe put on her hat and went in. In her two

months in this office, she had never had occasion to come in contact with either Kane or Bergman, their demands from the file usually being made through one of the flapper stenographers. She wondered why she was needed now.

Kane sat down without glancing at her after she was inside his door and looked hurriedly through some papers. His hands were thin, tanned, muscular hands—outdoor hands, Zoe thought. His face wasn't a business face either, but—well, more of a scholar's. His slightly stooped shoulders, too—— He looked up and Zoe's eyes hastily dropped to the hands again.

"Here we are, Bowman & Smith, Albany. Dear Mr. Bowman: In regard to——"

Zoe realized that Kane accepted her as a stenographer. She got up.

"What's the trouble? Pencil? Here!" He shoved a pad and pencil at her, and began again——

"——the product seems to be one we are peculiarly qualified to advertise. Our campaign, as you know, for the Rosetree Saddle Company——"

Zoe was writing furiously in longhand, too intimidated by Kane's air to protest that she was only a file clerk. Kane finished and asked that she read the dictation.

"The product seems to be a peculiar one to advertise—oh, that can't be it!" Zoe was red with consternation.

Kane stared at her. "Haven't you taken dictation before?"

"I'm not a stenographer, you see," she explained, her pencil quivering in her nervous fingers. "I wanted to tell you but——"

"Of course!" Kane was embarrassed by the thought of his high-handedness. "You're a copy writer."

For an instant Zoe felt a burning elation. He actually thought she was a writer. It was a comfort to know that she didn't bear all the marks of the file clerk.

"I'm not—yet, but I'd like to be," she said breathlessly, looking eagerly at him. "I'm just filing now to—to get a line on the firm's policy."

"Hmph." Mr. Kane was temporarily interested and shot a covert glance at Zoe. Attractive. Or perhaps more clever-looking than attractive. Stupid of him to start dictating without even seeing her. Why, it might even have been a prospective lady client and then he would have been in a mess! It was the strain of this damned advertising business. . . .

"Working up, eh?" Kane smiled, and Zoe wondered if she had been mistaken in her first estimate of his age. She had thought thirty-five at least, but he probably wasn't much over thirty. Odd.

"That was my plan," she answered swiftly. So this was how one found a career. You didn't seek it or fret over it, but simply waited and let

things drift until suddenly the goal appeared. She hadn't known she wanted to be an advertising writer. She thought she wanted to become a playwright, but when the one was so far away and the other so near. . . . Writing copy wasn't writing plays, but it was glorious compared with filing. It even seemed inexplicably more alluring than May Roberts's hack writing.

Kane toyed with a paper cutter for a moment.

"Since you're trying out the business, perhaps you've thought of a good catch phrase for Voorhees Cold Cream."

Zoe's brain became hot with the necessity for quick thinking. Here, now, was her chance. Was she equal to it? She should flash something staggeringly big, something that would make Kane stare with admiration. Something—her mind was a horrible blank.

"The Cream of Fair Women," she heard herself saying, and felt Kane's surprised approval.

"Why—why, by Jove, that's not bad. Not bad, at all. The Cream of Fair Women. With a pageant of beautiful Helens and Ninons in the background."

His lean, almost ascetically modeled face plainly expressed approbation and Zoe, who had spoken before she had even formed the thought, was choky with excitement.

Kane wrote the phrase down on a pad and smiled thoughtfully.

"If this is a go, you're quite likely to find

yourself embarked on your copy-writing career. As a matter of fact, Bergman was just speaking of getting a girl in the copy room. We have so many cosmetic accounts which really require the feminine angle. Bergman spoke of an experienced writer, but since you seem to have ideas, he may make a concession."

Zoe's head throbbed and she could barely murmur her thanks. Kane called over his shoulder to young Cornell in the big office.

"What do you think of this for Voorhees—Cream of Fair Women?"

Cornell looked up.

"Good stuff," he exclaimed. "The stenogs will eat it."

Kane's gray eyes smiled through their shell-rimmed spectacles at Zoe.

"I'll see to it that you get a tryout in the copy room," he promised. "You are Miss ——"

Zoe supplied the name.

"They may think my line was too tricky," she said anxiously.

"Then you'll have to give us another," answered Kane. He went back to his little glass-enclosed office and the papers on the desk reminded him of the Bowman Smith letter.

"Sorry to have been so insistent about that letter," he apologized. "I hadn't seen you in the file room, or I would have known."

"Miss Colburn brought me here," Zoe volunteered, to help his memory. It was not gratify-

ing to be around a place two months and not be noticed.

"The little kid with the snub nose," Kane reflected. He closed his desk. Zoe liked the leisurely assurance of his movements. She went out for her hat again. She looked in the little cracked mirror and this time——! A miracle, surely! Gone were the blue shadows and the tired lines around her mouth! Why, she didn't look over eighteen years old! And anyway, was twenty-three so terribly old? Certainly not. It was the very door of things!

Zoe hummed a little song as she tilted her hat at the most rakish angle, adjusted her little round lace collar and pulled on her brown jacket.

"Think over that cold cream, Miss Bourne," Kane called out to her. "See if you can't find some new angle of it to treat in the papers."

"I will!" sang out Zoe, her hand on the door-knob. Her ideas were necessary to the firm! Thousands of dollars, millions, perhaps, depended on her brain! The Cream of Fair Women! How stupendously clever! Wasn't it splendid? This, now, this was New York.

She waited a long time for the elevator, and Mr. Kane and Cornell joined her before the car actually stopped. Zoe stole a look at the latter. He *was* good looking. There was a nice, healthy look about him. He was—well, the sort of man one married. A little too normal to be really

interesting, like Mr. Kane was, for instance, but—well, he *was* good looking.

The gentlemen stood, hats in hand, waiting for Zoe to enter the car. Once inside, Kane turned to her.

“Do you know Mr. Cornell? Ah, permit me—Miss Bourne, Mr. Cornell.”

Their eyes met and they bowed. Mr. Kane, Mr. Cornell and Miss Bourne fixed their eyes on the operator's back. The car shot down to the main floor.

Zoe found Maisie lounging with extravagant ease on Julie's bed, while Julie was dashing madly about the room, preparing for her dress rehearsal in New Haven. Zoe tossed her wraps on the bed and sat down.

“What's up? Got a date?” demanded Maisie, lifting her head from her two clasped hands. “Say, Julie, look at our little Zoe, will you? Looks as if she'd got a raise or worse.”

“I can't be annoyed—too many troubles of my own.” Julie's voice came muffled from the closet.

Zoe poured out her story to Maisie's astonished ears. Julie, herself, stopped with a frown in the midst of her preparations.

“But how are you going to get away with it?” she demanded. “You can't really write, can you?”

“Of course I can,” somewhat crossly retorted

Zoe. "And I have ideas. Ideas are the main thing in advertising."

Julie said nothing more but secured her hat and cloak and went out murmuring something about Alphonse going to drive her over.

"Good luck. Here's hoping Belasco or the Shuberts go over and see you work!" called Zoe, as Julie, a flushed, silent Julie, in a new green suit, started out the hall door.

"Better for Julie if they didn't," dryly observed Maisie. "Say, about that promotion. I'll say you fell in luck. Mr. Kane is a queer duck, though, isn't he? They say he works a few months and makes a lot of money. The rest of the time he bums around the world, until starvation drives him to work again. They say his wife is hopeless, an awful highbrow. It was one of these literary, platonic affairs and they fell out in no time at all. I guess she made him spend their honeymoon in Brentano's."

"Perhaps she prefers him to have a steady income," suggested Zoe. It annoyed her, vaguely, that Kane should be married.

Maisie pointed warningly to Julie's desk clock. It was dinner time. Zoe leaped to her feet.

"Let's hurry down before Amy Bruce gets me and asks me to go out with her tonight."

"Don't worry," said Maisie. "She goes out alone lately."

Zoe felt discomfited. She had fully expected

to have Amy after her every minute to go out walking and she had thought of all kinds of excuses to make. But Amy had seemed to avoid her ever since that night at Pelham Heath. She hadn't taken with the boys, that was it. She wasn't pretty or lively enough! Zoe had no particular liking for either of the two men. But to have them dare to dislike *her*. Probably they had said to Amy, "Don't bring her next time. She's too slow."

Zoe burned at the thought.

"What's the matter?" demanded Maisie, getting up finally.

"Nothing. Let's go down."

At dinner, Zoe saw that Amy Bruce was absent. She didn't care. What were Amy and her street acquaintances to her? She told Mrs. Horne of her good luck at the office. The lady beamed rosily and patted Zoe on the arm.

"Splendid, my dear, splendid! I love to see my girls get on. Don't I, girls?"

"Yes, indeed," feebly encored Miss Tait. "I'm sure you do, Mrs. Horne."

"Mrs. Horne feels exactly as I do," Mrs. Shaw, a buxom, glittering divorcée of near sixty, broke in. "I know when my daughter, at that time chairman of the Weehawken Benjamin Franklin Society, one of the most exclusive clubs in Detroit, with the possible exception of the Hunters' and Riders' Club—well, when my daughter—a beautiful girl, as Mrs. Horne will

tell you—used to say, ‘Gertrude,’ she’d say—she always called me Gertrude, because, she said, we were more pals than mother and daughter, and it’s true, too, because many times when she’d have a young man calling, he’d say, ‘Mrs. Shaw,’ he’d say, ‘you know you seem as much of a girl as Lilian is.’ Lilian is my daughter. But, as I said, she’d often say to me, ‘Gertrude, you are just like a mirror for me. I tell you of my successes, and it’s like having them happen all over again.’ I was so sympathetic, you see.

“And when, oftentimes, one of our maids would be ill, and I’d be entertaining, as I often did, some of our wealthy friends there in Detroit, many of them worth millions, in fact far more than we were, why——”

“How true!” exclaimed Mrs. Horne, courteously, her eye on the bread tray, which was moored to Mrs. Shaw’s plate. “Ah—ah—Mrs. Shaw——”

“——I would, myself, personally, have Hawkins bring one of the closed cars and drive me to her home and——”

“The bread, if you don’t mind,” hissed Mrs. Horne. “Yes, indeed.”

“——‘if there’s anything,’ I’d say, ‘anything on earth that can be done——’ ”

“Yes, the bread, if it’s not too much trouble.” Mrs. Horne spoke louder.

“——‘if you are in want,’ I’d say, ‘anything that human power can do——’ ”

"The bread!" Mrs. Horne was insistent. Miss Tait, too, looked anxious.

Mrs. Shaw, with a magnificently jeweled hand, swept the bread plate toward Mrs. Horne. Zoe found Maisie's foot frantically kicking hers under the table, and gulped.

"——I passed Edgar Guest on the way—a charming fellow, the poet, you know, and he said, 'Mrs. Shaw,' he said——"

"The butter, please!" demanded Miss Tait.

Mrs. Shaw stopped short. Three or four were leaving the table. Mrs. Horne was looking impatient and Miss Tait was looking hungry.

"The butter!" repeated Miss Tait.

Mrs. Shaw pushed the butter toward her and rose, her long nose red with irritation and her beady eyes glittering.

"I forgot," she said, "that in this house food is of more importance than conversation."

"That lady said a faceful," vulgarly remarked Maisie, as the conversationalist swept out of the room.

Mrs. Horne gave Zoe a fixed, weary smile.

"At any rate," she said, "we are so glad to hear of your success."

"Come on, Zoe," whispered Maisie, "before Mrs. Shaw comes back for her dessert."

"After glancing at her memoirs to get some new anecdotes," added one of the little blond art students.

Zoe and Maisie hurried away. They stopped

in the lobby to look over the mail and so saw Amy Bruce coming in the front door with a man. Zoe recognized him as "Chuck." He nodded to her, aloofly, and Zoe, flushed and annoyed, hurried upstairs to avoid Amy's greeting.

CHAPTER V

QUITE unexpectedly Zoe decided to call on Allie Merton that evening. Maisie had begged her to go to the movies, but Zoe had insisted that the eighty cents in her pocket was to last her for the next three days, so how could she go anywhere.

"We could get cut-rate theater tickets at Gray's," Maisie suggested. "I have two dollars. Maybe we could go to the Follies."

"I don't have anything to wear," protested Zoe.

"Say, where did you think you were going to sit?" Maisie cried, indignantly. "Nobody in this house ever sits in front of the top gallery. The back row, too. I've backed half of the musical comedies of the season."

Zoe hesitated.

"I really ought to look up Allie. Here, I've been here three months without looking her up. We went to school together in Albon, you know, and it was through her that I heard of Mrs. Horne's."

"Fania says she's carrying on the old tradition of Albon home life," giggled Maisie. "Babies every year, and sometimes in between. Guess she longs for the old, care-free career days."

Husbands are all right, but families are a different matter, speaking from the heart."

"I'd like to see what New York home life is," Zoe said. "And I ought to tell Allie about deciding to go into ad writing instead of doing general office work."

Maisie waved her hand airily.

"All right. Only I prefer to see my home life from the movies. It's not half so dull."

Allie would be astonished at her good luck, Zoe reflected, putting on her hat. She had always written such tales of success to Zoe, when she had been in theatrical publicity. Now that she was married and living a stupid, domestic life in the Bronx, she would probably be a little envious of Zoe's rise. But that, in itself, would be a tribute. Zoe decided that she wouldn't gloat over Allie, of course, now that New York was opening its door to her. She would simply mention her promotion casually, as if it were nothing to her.

She took the subway up to the queer group of little towns known collectively as the Bronx. Allie lived in a smugly new apartment house. She came to the door at Zoe's ring and pulled her into the little box of an apartment, her voice shrill with excitement. Zoe felt pleased and magnanimous at having the power to bring such pleasure.

"And you never met Frank, or Junior, or Betsey, did you? Of course the babies are in

bed, but pretty soon we'll take a peek at them. Frank, this is Zoe—you remember my telling you about her."

Frank, pallid and academic looking, sat under a rosy, Bronx-looking floor lamp, reading from some weighty tome. He smiled a faint welcome to Zoe and shook her hand limply. Allie, plump and very obviously wearing a maternity dress which didn't show a thing, looked at him with eyes soft with pride. Zoe had a fleeting curiosity concerning Allie's choosing Frank instead of her three-thousand-dollar job in publicity. She decided that she must have lost her job first.

She answered Allie's questions about Albon and Frank's polite query about her work.

"Bergman's? That Christopher Kane is with them now, I believe." Frank's voice was respectful. "Once he was with our firm. He's very erratic. Left our place to go to Iceland for a year."

"Yes, Mr. Kane and I——" began Zoe, proudly, but Allie had grasped her arm and was leading her toward the bedroom.

"Back in a moment, dear. Just go on with your reading."

"About my job, Allie, I've just——"

"Yes, so you said. I wanted to tell you something, Zoe." Allie switched on the dresser light in the tiny bedroom, and leaned toward Zoe, significantly. "I'm going to have another baby in May. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Allie! But you've got two!"

"I know it's loads of work," nodded Allie. "They'll all be babies at once, you know. Junior isn't three yet, and Betsey's just eighteen months. But I'm crazy to have another little boy."

"Oh," Zoe said weakly.

"Julie was out last month and so was Enna—you know I roomed with Enna when I lived at Mrs. Horne's—but I didn't tell them." Allie twisted her mouth resentfully. "You wouldn't believe it, Zoe, but before the babies came, all the women I knew would be so pitying about it. Actually, they'd ask me if I'd tried everything—this fake doctor in Jersey and all. When I told them I wanted babies—I really did, too!—they smiled and you could tell they didn't believe me at all. Julie and Enna think it's so bourgeois to be having babies all the time. I'd like to know what they think one gets married for. I knew what I wanted."

Zoe was not at all sure she did not consider a baby a calamity nowadays, when there were so many fascinating things for women without responsibilities to do.

"They were thinking of your career," she suggested.

"So was I," answered Allie. "I knew just exactly where I'd be in ten years if I kept on with it. A hard-boiled press agent—a human fish. Anyway I didn't take it up as a life work.

I did what most girls do—took something to amuse and support me until I could get the man I wanted.”

Allie was so cocksure about it, as if she, Zoe, was working merely to mark time until she too could “get the man she wanted.” But she said merely: “How did you know he was the one you wanted?”

“Because,” said Allie, “the minute I saw him I wanted to have a dozen of his babies, all of them to look just like him.”

“Good heavens, Allie!”

Allie wagged her head decidedly.

“I’d had beaux before, but never, never had I felt like that. I was like Julie and the rest of Mrs. Horne’s girls, babies never entered into my scheme of things. I thought they were the things that spoiled love. And when I had this queer feeling about wanting to have babies for Frank, I knew—I simply knew, Zoe, that I must have him.”

“Are you still just as sure?” asked Zoe, curiously.

“Absolutely. He is so wonderful to me. He’s doing very well now, too. He is a commercial artist, you know. Of course we can’t have lots of things, simply because of the children. They take so much. . . . But, Zoe, Frank and I are possessed with the idea that we must perpetuate our love. People laugh, but we look on each baby the way most people look at a thousand

dollars in the bank. A definite achievement, you know—a safeguard against a loveless old age.”

She looked mistily toward the nursery door.

“I have names for all of them, too. The next one will be Robert and then Candace—I adore that name—and then Charles, and Felix and Lisa. . . . They have such funny little faces, Zoe, when they’re first born. They burrow in your arms like little rabbits and their little wet mouths fasten on to anything soft they can find, just like leeches.”

Zoe was uncomfortable. She was always embarrassed when she felt her emotions being swayed to something sentimental and cloying and she felt definitely, as Allie talked, that she wanted babies, too. It was a disturbing thought.

“Suppose you let me see the nursery,” she suggested. “Then I must run along, really.”

Allie, tiptoeing, led the way to the nursery. It was the room originally destined for the living room, but the passionate parents had sacrificed it to the children. Allie lit a small night lamp for an instant, revealing the two white beds, an enormous, beady-eyed teddy bear, a slightly lopsided toy wheelbarrow and a shadowy wall of shelved toys. Zoe followed her to the baby’s bed, where Betsey, or a round face, chubby fist and patch of black hair, representing all that was visible of Betsey above her blankets, slept.

"Ah," Zoe whispered, vaguely resentful of the tug at her emotions.

"Here's Junior."

Junior, a sprawling miniature of Frank, had to be collected and put under the covers. Zoe praised him and Allie looked plumply virtuous.

They came out again. Frank offered to go out and get ice cream, but Zoe protested that she must get home at once. She had very important things to do the first thing in the morning. You see now she had a great deal of responsibility as copy writer and——

"She thought," said Allie, gently, "that Frank looked like you."

Frank looked as pleased and astonished as if no one had ever mentioned the resemblance before, as if, Zoe thought spitefully, he were the last person on earth the baby would be expected to resemble.

Zoe hurried into her hat and coat. She was disgusted with them and their preoccupation with their own affairs. They had not given her the slightest chance to tell what she had come up expressly to tell—that she had taken up an advertising career, that she really was in charge of the Voorhees Cold Cream account and that it was nothing—nothing at all.

"Old married pigs," she told herself, viciously, all the while smiling politely and making pleasant adieus. "Self-satisfied and uninterested in everything but themselves. It's vanity, that's

all it is, that makes them want to have dozens of babies just like themselves. They might, at least, have asked me how I was getting on. Allie always was egotistical."

"And next time, you must tell me all about your work and how you like Mrs. Horne's," begged Allie, leaning snugly against Frank.

"I will," promised Zoe, adding, mentally, "Yes, after me, you first."

She went down the stairs, grumbling to herself all the way to the subway. Of course she did like Allie and she was glad she was happy, but. . . . She wondered if there was anything in this baby idea that Allie had. Would she ever feel like that? She was certain none of the other girls at Mrs. Horne's did. She had a disgusting conviction that Allie was right. . . . Everybody ought to have babies.

She got on the train and chuckled spasmodically to find her mind unconsciously rephrasing Allie's words into advertising lingo.

BABIES!

The Love Perpetuators!

Burrowing into Your Heart! Sliding into
Your Soul!

*Every Baby Represents a Thousand Dollars
in the Bank of Love!*

BEGIN TODAY!

"And then a poster," mused Zoe, "saying: 'A Baby a Year Keeps the Doctor.'"

CHAPTER VI

It was Saturday afternoon and Maisie, all dressed up in her new winter hat and new shoes, had been pleading for some one to go out with her. Zoe was lying on her bed and Julie was in the midst of one of her thorough cosmetic treatments.

"Constance Talmadge is up at the Adelphi. And Joe Cook's at the Riverside," encouraged Maisie, looking hopefully from one to the other. "You've no idea how funny he is. He's the one that imitates the four Hawaiians playing the ukalilly. And then he——"

"Hate vaudeville!" retorted Julie, her face smothered in a huge wet towel.

"Too tired. Got to rest," said Zoe, placidly. "You know I worked late last night. Mr. Cornell and Mr. Kane and I had to finish up an ad series that had to get to the printer by seven this morning. It was after eleven when I got home."

"Which one brought you home?" asked Julie, idly. "Your Mr. Kane sounds interesting."

"He's married," said Maisie, impatiently. "And here it is three o'clock, a wonderful day, and you two things stick around the house like a couple of what-nots. Take a walk up Broadway anyway, Zoe."

"I came home alone," Zoe answered Julie.

"They put me on a bus at Twenty-fifth Street and I told them I'd be perfectly all right."

"I love the way you pass up your opportunities," said Julie, tossing the towel into a basin of ice water and then pressing it against her face and neck until they were fiery red.

Maisie disgustedly threw off her hat and sat down in the wicker rocker.

"'Spose I'll have to invite Enna. . . . No, I'll stay in. Say, if you two won't go out, I won't answer for myself. I'm likely to go out and pick up some old boy and go down to the Ritz for supper."

"Wish you luck," languidly answered Julie. She was patting into her face a sort of beauty mask of clay and grimaced at her image in the mirror.

One of the older art students, Fania Tell, looked in the door and then came in.

"Just came down to pay Mrs. Horne while my allowance lasts," she said. "She isn't in and that means I'll go out and spend it all in about ten minutes."

"Give it to Maisie and she'll save it for you," suggested Julie, her face now completely covered with the gray mud. "Maisie's the only tightwad in the house."

"I like that!" indignantly cried Maisie. "Me supporting the lot of you, too. I may be a tightwad but I notice that I'm the only one who ever has anything to lend."

"It's true," Zoe agreed from the bed. "Maisie's the only person in the house who loans money. Every one else shuts up like a clam at the mere mention of a loan." She was silent a moment and then, "I think if you were starving and the girls knew it, they wouldn't loan anything for fear they'd have to do without a marcel that week."

"Getting personal?"

Julie's voice sounded aggressive and Zoe hastened to reassure her.

"Merely generalizing, Julie. But look at Enna, who has so much, and nothing to spend it on except her music lessons and clothes. And Olive Tanhill, who never does anything but buy clothes and take Turkish baths and go to the theater, studying contemporary drama, as she says! They wouldn't give a starving friend a quarter. Yet they all manage to pamper themselves without doing a stroke of work."

"They're artists," giggled Maisie. "Olive's supposed to be an actress, only she's never been on the stage. Just looks in a manager's office a couple of times a year to see if she's needed to take Julia Marlowe's place. And Enna—say, what I know about that girl, my friends."

"What?"

Maisie looked inexpressibly wise.

"I don't know yet, but I don't think you could convince a jury with that Boston mama story.

I saw a check on her desk and a note that looked mighty funny, yesterday."

"What were you doing in her desk?" demanded Zoe.

"Snooping," cheerfully answered Maisie.

"I think I know," Fania Tell said slowly.

"A former fiancé, or some one——"

"Blackmail!" whispered Maisie, significantly.

"Enna's having a career on blood money!"

"I knew it!" nodded Julie, triumphantly.

"They were engaged and he backed out and wanted to marry some one else," said Fania. "But Enna, it appears, refused to get out of the way without a consideration."

"Right," admitted Maisie. "I gather from my—ahem—investigations that his people are very rich and move in circles."

"So prim little Enna has a past," gloated Julie. "How refreshing!"

"I'd rather pay her than marry her," observed Fania.

Zoe was speechless. That such things could happen under one's very nose! And Enna, of all people. Zoe shivered. It was so close that it might almost have been herself in Enna's boots.

"What will Mrs. Horne do if she hears?" she asked.

"Pooh! She knows. She could probably give you the name of the man," declared Fania. She rose from the end of the bed where she had been

sitting. "I have to get some sketches touched up for my dress design class. I have a stunning idea. I'm sure Mr. Hartwell will like it."

She picked up a piece of manuscript paper from Zoe's desk and began sketching. Her lines were not particularly striking and Zoe was surprised. It was just the sort of sketch any one might have done, artist or no artist.

"Good looking," approved Maisie, studying the paper over Fania's shoulder. "Fania, you'll land at Lucile's yet as chief designer."

"Perhaps," Fania laughed, self-consciously. "I'm going to fix up my original now. Come on up and I'll show you some more of my designs."

She was gone and Julie sniffed.

"Did anybody see the gold and sapphire dress in Hagedorn's window this week? Well, that's Fania's original design."

"Cat!"

"It's true," insisted Julie. "And the rest of her creations she copies right out of the fashion magazines or shop windows. She's a nice girl, but she's a cheat. She can't design and she can't even draw."

"I was surprised that a real artist should make such a smeary drawing," confessed Zoe. "But perhaps she's just as much the real thing in her way as the rest of us are in ours."

"It's a house of failures," said Julie, bitterly. "You're right. We're a fine lot to criticize each other."

Zoe and Maisie were silent, thinking of Julie's latest theatrical job. The play had been discarded after two performances in New Haven. Julie's part had been conspicuously badly played and, sensing the fact, she had been depressed ever since.

"They may all be failures," observed Maisie, "but none of them know it, so it doesn't make any difference. I suppose they all have a little pet idea—I know I do—that they're right on the verge of a big killing, and they keep going on and on, right in a circle. They think there'll be a corner pretty soon with the Great Surprise behind it. Any fool knows, though, that circles don't have corners."

"You'd think," said Zoe, without diplomacy, "that after a girl was twenty-five and nothing had happened yet, she'd realize she was pretty commonplace and quit fooling herself."

"Twenty-five!" exclaimed Julie, irritatedly. "Don't be childish, Zoe. I admit that she ought to know by thirty-five, but twenty-five is only the beginning of things."

Zoe shuddered.

"I always thought that by the time I was twenty-five I would have reached the crossroads and turned the corner to somewhere—very definitely, you know. I'd die right now if I thought I wouldn't know for another twelve years."

"Of course," Maisie said, insolently, "Miss Tait tells me that she considers sixty the turning

point in a girl's career. She will know then whether she's going to keep drumming away at library stuff or write movie scenarios."

"Or get a man," Julie was sarcastic. "That's always an exciting alternative to becoming a great artist. When you see failure ahead, the thing to do is to become some man's wife or mistress. At least have something happen. I've known girls to do just that—merely for the sake of feeling important."

"Enna must have felt important once," Maisie said.

"How old is Enna now?" idly asked Zoe.

"About thirty or so, like the rest of us," Julie replied.

Maisie gave Zoe a knowing kick, but Zoe was too startled to heed it. Julie—thirty! Why, thirty was the old maid's age. People were in the rut they intended to live in by the time they were thirty. Yet here was Julie and the rest of the girls—irresponsible, uncertain, as wavering as if they were barely eighteen and had years to decide what to do with themselves. And she, Zoe, had now joined the same blind, faltering crew. Would she be like that at thirty? Fumbling opportunities because they meant work or sacrifice, not sure whether fame meant happiness anyway, and always waiting, waiting for the great earthquake that would bring her the vague thing she wanted?

Zoe looked at Julie. Julie's face, the clay

removed, was as pink and smooth as a young girl's and her neck and arms were roundly perfect. She didn't even look as old as Maisie, and Maisie was only twenty. Of course, Maisie was a mousy person who probably would look the same from fifteen to forty. But it was amazing to see the way Julie nourished her youth.

"I was thinking you don't even look twenty-five," Zoe apologized for her earnest scrutiny.

"Stuff!" scoffed Julie, and Zoe caught a glimpse of an oddly old look in her eyes.

"If you ask me," offered Maisie, "most girls come to the great city not because of art but because of the temptations, from the way most of them chase after it. You know, yourself, Julie, that you and Fania and Marg never think of going out without being prepared for a possible seduction. Defending yourself with your best chiffon lingerie and so on."

Julie laughed uncontrollably. She began combing her yellow hair.

"It's dangerous, too," pursued Maisie. "If you ask me, girls, I'd say that it wasn't morals but flannel underwear that makes girls keep their heads. I'm going to start a Flannel Rage when I get to be an old and respectable lady. You know you can't keep nonsense—this arty nonsense for one thing—in your head, when you've got a flannel petticoat on."

"The thought makes me shudder," laughed

Julie. "And you needn't bother your little head about me, Maisie. My chiffons haven't come up to the seduction standard yet. But then, my standard is very high."

"I think," said Zoe, conscious of an irresistible need for fresh air, "I'll go out with Maisie."

"Well, I'm going to show Broadway my new clothes. I'll bet I knock 'em cold," Maisie said, admiring herself in Julie's mirror. "Come on, Zoe."

But Mrs. Horne, coming in at that moment to see Zoe, made Maisie go out alone. Zoe was rather glad, for she really wanted to be alone by the river and wonder about the queer philosophies one learned in New York. She walked out, after Mrs. Horne left, and strolled bare-headed along the Drive. Somehow these discussions oppressed her and left her with pessimistic doubts of her own ability to meet life gallantly.

CHAPTER VII

MAISIE was the Queen of the May these days at Mrs. Horne's, because Maisie had suddenly acquired a millionaire.

On a certain Saturday afternoon, in fact, on the very day she had besought Zoe and Julie to take a walk with her, she had gone into Evart's Drug Store for her Saturday celebration of a frosted chocolate. The soda fountain was not popular as it had been in the earlier months, and Maisie found a man and herself the only patrons. He was a stoutish young man, well dressed, with a sturdy little blond moustache as his chief claim to beauty. He was disconsolately sipping a sarsaparilla through a straw, when Maisie accidentally caught his glance in the fountain mirror. His eye became hopeful. He came up to her.

"Don't you want one of those little log-cabin candy boxes?" he inquired, eagerly.

"I'll take one, thanks," answered Maisie, dryly, "as I leave."

She lifted her soda glass and drained the last of her chocolate. When she turned to slide down the stool, she was amazed to see the man extending one of the five-pound candy boxes to her. He looked anxious.

"Say, where do you get that way?" demanded Maisie, unwilling to be taken in.

"I—I thought you'd like it," he said, aggrievedly. "I just bought it for you. I—well, the fact is I got word this morning that I have a million dollars. It's in fruit down in Central America. The only relative I had in the world—a great uncle—died and it all came to me. A million dollars."

Maisie's jaw dropped. She thrust out her hand and pumped his warmly.

"Say, I—I think that's great," she cried, earnestly. "That's wonderful. A whole million. Say! What are you going to do with it? Gee, I'll bet you were knocked silly when you heard."

The millionaire beamed happily.

"You bet I was. I—well, I wanted to rush out and tell everybody. Only I didn't know a soul in New York. I didn't have anybody to wire to. You see I've been to sea for the last four years—just finished my hitch, and say, I was nearly crazy. I tried to tell the bell-hop and the night clerk at my hotel and they almost threw me out. Wouldn't believe me. I went into a store and told a corset saleslady—first person I saw that looked nice—and she thought I was kidding. Nobody would believe me. I felt blue. No fun having a windfall if nobody will take your word for it."

"Sure," Maisie was sympathetic. "I think

it's fine, though. Simply wonderful. Is that why you bought the candy?"

"Yes. I thought you looked as if you—well, as if you were the kind that would believe a fellow. I'm awfully glad you did. Now I begin to feel as if I really were a millionaire. I want you to take this candy and then maybe you'll remember me next time I blow in town."

"Of course I'll remember you," Maisie warmly assured him. "I don't meet millionaires every day. My name's Maisie Colburn, and here's my address."

"Tom Barrett is my name." They walked out of the drug store together and the millionaire took Maisie home. He was leaving for Washington, he said, right away, but when he came back he wanted Maisie to go on a party with him.

But when Maisie told her tale to the girls, she had the same experience that her new friend had. Nobody believed her.

"I don't think Maisie is kidding. I think somebody's kidding her," protested Zoe. "Maisie, the invulnerable, has been taken in by some Corn-Belt drummer."

"It's a wonder he didn't take you right down to the St. Regis for tea," scoffed Julie. "Honestly, Maisie, you didn't believe all that rot, did you? Why, I think that every man who's tried to pick me up for the last ten years has just inherited a million."

"They may all have told the truth. How do you know?" calmly returned Maisie. "It's funny, girls, but do you know it never struck me at all that he might be lying?"

Then for several days the thing was to tease Maisie about her millionaire, until one Friday night, two weeks later, the telephone rang during the dinner hour. There was the usual tense silence as Clematia answered it. Girls who wanted to pretend that *they*, at least, had no false hopes, tried to open feverish conversation with impatient others who were sure the call was for them.

"Julie, of course," Amy Bruce muttered, although Amy herself had had a number of calls lately.

But it proved to be Maisie's millionaire, inviting her to dine with him the following evening at the Ritz.

"Take a hat pin along, Maisie," warned Olive Tanhill. "You never can tell about these fellows."

"I wouldn't dream of going," declared Enna. But Maisie had no thought of refusing.

The next afternoon Zoe and Julie and Fania gathered in Julie's room for the express purpose of making Maisie presentable for the Ritz.

"The first thing is to do something about your hair," Julie declared critically. "I don't want to offend you, Maisie, but your hair is the worst thing about you. It's so skimpy and

straight and the color is all wrong. It ought to be hennaed outright instead of staying that rust color. Don't you think so, Zoe?"

"I'd hate to henna it." Zoe had a provincial weakness for letting alone the unfortunate features with which one was born. "Anyway, it seems to me that Maisie's complexion isn't right for hennaed hair. It ought to be yellow. The hair, I mean."

"Why not run out right now and have it blondined?" suggested Fania.

"I should say not," exclaimed Julie. "She's not a blonde type. She simply has to have it hennaed. She'll look a different person. I'll give you a wonderful facial and make you all up, Maisie, and, with your hennaed hair, you'll look like a Follies beauty."

Maisie was docile, but uncertain whose ideas to follow.

"Zoe says it ought to be yellow," she demurred. "Still, I don't care what you do with it. I do want to look pretty. What shall I do about an evening dress?"

"Leave that to us," sternly reprimanded Julie. "The hair's the thing now. It ought to be hennaed, and you ought to trot right over this minute and have it done. I'll call up Dixon's."

"Oh, Julie, she hasn't the eyebrows or complexion for hennaed hair," chorused Zoe and Fania. "She'd look terrible."

The argument that followed anent Maisie's

possibilities as a blonde lasted half an hour. Finally Julie, in exasperation, turned to Maisie.

"Maisie, for heaven's sake, haven't you any ideas on the subject?"

Maisie pondered. Finally she was inspired.

"I know!" she cried, "let's wash it."

Strangely enough, the shampoo which immediately followed her inspiration had most gratifying results. Her hair, under Julie's electric curler, became a sandy mop of gleaming curls, clipped very short, barely below the ears. Julie's promised facial treatment was equally satisfactory, and Maisie emerged as Julie had prophesied, quite a different person.

While Zoe and Fania went around to every one's room, pleading for an evening dress for Maisie, Julie was stuffing cotton in the toes of her own evening slippers in order that they might fit Maisie.

"They're a little wobbly," Maisie admitted, standing in her—or rather Fania's—pink silk knickers and vest with Julie's shoes and stockings, before the long mirror, "but they do look nice."

"They look too big," Julie stated, "but they'll have to do. I hope they get a decent dress for you. That one of mine looks like two of you. Too bad Zoe doesn't have any. Hers might fit you."

Zoe and Fania had no luck. The dresses offered were not the sort of thing one could

wear with a Ritz millionaire, and those who had the right kind of dresses were not the lending sort.

"Enna's not home," mused Julie. "There's her blue velvet. It's too tight for me, so it might fit you. I'll go over there and look for it. It's short even on Enna. I think we could fix it."

But a search did not reveal it. Julie sought out Clematia and returned triumphantly with a suit box, which she opened, revealing the sapphire-blue velvet.

"She had left it with Clematia to go to the cleaner's. But it really isn't dirty, not half so bad, at least, as it will be." She held it up to Maisie and then slipped it over her head.

"Stunning!" Fania and Zoe said breathlessly, while Maisie looked with silent awe at her new image in the mirror. The blue was exactly the right color for her and her hair took on a new charm in contrast.

"Your shoulders are a little too skinny for velvet," Julie stood back critically, "but you won't notice that under soft lights. The dress fits like a glove. Enna ought to give it to you. She looks absolutely rotten in blue. No, don't take it off. It's five-thirty already and your little millionaire is calling at six. What for, God knows. Nobody dines before seven—ever."

Maisie turned anxiously to Zoe.

"You tell me the truth, Zoe. Do I really look

all right and not like some kid dressed up in Salvation Army clothes? I feel like a fool."

"Maisie, you look like an heiress," Zoe told her candidly. "I never guessed you were such a knockout."

"Let me rest now, until he comes," pleaded Maisie, worn out by the preparations.

"Not until we've located an evening cloak," said Julie.

Another expedition followed to the four corners of Mrs. Horne's. But again, those who had evening cloaks made various excuses. Those who had none gladly proffered mackinaws and sweaters. Maisie herself returned dubiously from the top floor with a plaid sport coat. Julie fairly snapped at her.

"But she told me I was welcome to it," whimpered Maisie.

"That's the way of it," agreed Fania, "and you have to take it, Julie. You can't very well say, 'Sorry, old thing, but this is a lousy looking old number,' after you've asked a girl for just any old thing in foolish hope that she'll be decent enough to offer her sables. Still, that little model there is a bit gay for this affair. I don't remember ever getting anything quite that bad."

Julie was disturbed. Enna's evening wraps had suddenly disappeared from her shelves since Julie's last borrowing, so that nothing could be expected from that quarter. It was getting on

toward six, too. She inspected her own wardrobe, and then Zoe's, without result.

"You have to have an evening cloak, or you can't go. . . . Wait."

She held out the black velvet curtain on the closet door, calculatingly, and the next moment had ripped it from the pole. She draped it over Maisie's shoulder with singular effectiveness.

"About a dozen stitches and that squirrel fur piece of Enna's and we'll have a cape that will make your millionaire's eyes pop out," Julie promised, threading her needle. "I'm only sorry I didn't think of this for myself the other night. Fania, run over to Enna's room and get her fur. She keeps it under the mattress in the quaint belief that I can't find it."

By six o'clock, Maisie was such a vision that her three creators felt truly repaid for their afternoon's labors. Tom Barrett had sent a limousine with the announcement that he would meet her at the Ritz. Maisie tiptoed, awestruck at her own beauty, down the stairs. Julie hissed advice from the landing. Once inside the hotel, Julie commanded, Maisie was to go at once to the cloak room and powder and rouge to make up for the bloom she may have lost on the way down.

This advice Maisie religiously followed, without looking to right or left to see if her millionaire had already arrived. She was the only one in the cloak room and, after her cosmetic repairs,

she stood before the mirror for a long time, practicing various smiles, arch glances, and dignified poses, in an earnest attempt to find one that would be suitable to greet a millionaire. Achieving an unusually aristocratic smirk, she went out into the lobby and ran directly into Tom Barrett.

"What were you making all those faces for?" he asked her, curiously.

Maisie started.

"The curtain was open and I could see your face in the mirror," he explained.

Maisie laughed hysterically.

"Just some exercises," she said, mysteriously, "for double chin."

After the dinner there was "Lightnin'," but Maisie couldn't enjoy the play properly.

"You can't really see when you're so close," she confided to Tom. "Seeing the ceiling of the stage instead of the floor upsets me."

Tom chuckled.

"I used to sit in heaven when I was with the outfit and got into town on leave," he told her. "It was more fun, wasn't it?"

When they came out of the theater, Maisie, swaggering in her finery, led the way through the outgoing mob to the limousine.

"Hope somebody sees us," she whispered. "Maybe they'll think that we're used to this dope."

They rode in state up Broadway, through the

glitter of Columbus Circle and up to Eighty-third Street.

"We ought to go some place for supper," said Tom, but Maisie shook her head.

"Got to get up tomorrow and go to work. Can't stay out late."

"Some other time, then."

Maisie climbed regretfully out of the limousine at her door. Tom took her up the steps.

"Good night," Maisie said, her eyes shining, as she shook his hand. "Gee, it's been great. You know—the girls would say it was awful for me to tell—but I was never in a limousine before. Or the Ritz. I think they're both great."

"How about me?" insisted Barrett.

"You're all right," Maisie told him, sincerely. He stood there holding her hand and looking down at her until Maisie felt uncomfortable.

"You're real, Maisie. You're the real thing," he said. "We'll see each other again sometime."

"Good. So long." And Maisie, once inside the hall door, hitched up her bodice, pulled her skirt above her knees and scrambled upstairs at top speed to break the news.

CHAPTER VIII

ZOE learned about men one evening.

She learned about them in an excellent way—from other women. It came about one evening when Fania and the third-floor girls were in May Roberts's disordered, diminutive room. Most of the girls were home evenings now. The approach of Christmas and the consequent discreet evaporation of male escorts and callers had driven the girls to seek each other's company. And on this evening Zoe had started things going.

"I wonder," she queried, with an attempt at casualness, "if there is any sure way of making a man—ah—notice you, so to speak."

She was thinking, as she was at most other times, of Bill Cornell. It was incredible what a hold this perfectly normal young man had on her imagination. He was such a usual type—clean, wholesome, hundred per cent American. She could not understand her growing desire to interest him. He had not paid her much personal attention, but perhaps in New York girls used new methods of attracting men. If this was true, Fania and Julie would surely know.

"Of course," Julie's golden nose sniffed scornfully. "Indifference. Plain indifference."

Olive Tanhill's exquisitely tinted face clouded.

"That's all right for you, Julie," she said, sharply, looking up from her manicuring activities, "but the rest of us could be indifferent a lifetime and all we would get for our pains would be—indifference."

Julie shrugged and was silent.

"Ask his advice about something he doesn't know anything about," offered May Roberts. May, corsetless and kimonoed, squatted on the floor and smoked her own make.

"I know you'll think I'm old-fashioned," Margot Waite said apologetically, "but I've used 'Now tell me all about yourself' for years, and it always works. Of course you have to keep from twiddling with your thumb or tapping your foot—men always have so much to tell about themselves. There's a man now, for instance, working on an invention and he's always telling me about watts and that other thing that goes with watts—ersts or something. And I have to snap my eyes and suppress exclamations of surprise and awe through seven courses. Of course after I'm through dinner I quit being tactful, but his throat's sore by that time anyway."

"I couldn't be bored," yawned Fania. "For me, whenever I see that the gent in the party whom I prefer doesn't notice me, I say something picturesque."

"Picturesque?" eagerly asked Zoe.

"Ah—er—well, something that will make the

hearer picture me in a more entertaining guise than he at the moment sees me. Ahem! We'll say he is fastened to another girl and simply ignores me after the introduction. I get a few words in, and then—understand, girls, I lead up to it very smoothly—I say that I never wear nighties. Or that my new bathing suit turned out to be transparent as well as abbreviated. It gives him something to think about. He doesn't pay any attention to the other girl."

"Fania!"

"It answers the purpose," defended Fania. "He notices me, makes his speculations, and all I have to do then is to sit pretty. I act as proper as anything, but he hangs on sort of mystified, you know. Am I bad? Or am I good? Love, dear friends, begins with curiosity."

"Two curiosities," jeered Maisie.

"But—but—what should *I* do?" Zoe pinned the question to her own problem.

"I'm afraid Zoe looks too wholesome to get away with technique," criticized May Roberts. "Men don't like them to look healthy any more, and your sport clothes and bobbed hair and rubber heels and stuff like that are all wrong. In New York, at least. Nowadays men find a neurotic appeal in the wasted form, with lacy things dangling over pallid hands and all that stuff. You're thin enough to get away with it, too—sleazy draperies and stuff like that. The boyish stuff went out with flappers."

Zoe sat back disappointed. She couldn't buy all new clothes. And somehow she could not see herself in anything but simple, round-collared frocks with felt hats to match. Still, maybe that was why Bill Cornell didn't take her up. She fell to thinking how certain blouses could be transformed with lace collars, and her office dresses touched up with ruffles.

"Don't you find men more interested in you after they find you're engaged?" Margot asked Fania.

Fania had been engaged for years to some far-off "Ralph." It had not altered her conduct a great deal, except that she spread her little infidelities over several men, under the impression that there was loyalty in numbers.

"Funny the way engaged girls do take," commented Olive. "Single girls are considered as dangerous as hot bricks, from the way young bachelors slink off. On the other hand, married and engaged men seem frightfully dubby to women. We all cluster round the ugliest sort of bachelor instead of the handsomest married man."

"In public, only," muttered Maisie.

"Whenever I find out that a rather attractive man is engaged, I think, 'Well, that shows there must be something common about him after all. Domesticated. Bah!'" May made a face of disgust.

Zoe considered the possibility of faking a

fiancé. She doubted whether Cornell would be baited so easily.

"It's odd, but when you are really in love," Olive Tanhill said, "you forget all about technique. You show your feelings. You cry and let your nose get red and your paint smears your face. You make an absolute idiot of yourself and do all the things you advise other girls never to do. So that in the long run technique doesn't help you with men at all."

There was a silence, Zoe felt, as if each were remembering a time when technique failed. Maisie broke it.

"If you have to go to all that trouble for a temporary fiancé," she asked, "what in the world do you do to get a husband?"

"That, my dear," said May, dryly, "is something only wives can say."

"I'll tell you all next month," Julie said, gloomily. "I'm going to marry Alphonse after Christmas. The twenty-ninth."

"Are you sure?" Maisie asked.

"Why not?" Julie was annoyed. "I love him. He loves me. And the Spanish are so—so fascinating. Besides I'm sick of all this stuff, playing up to men that you really don't care about anyway and all that. I want something different. I don't give a whoop about the stage. I want—oh, I don't know what I want."

"Well, the only way to find out what you do want is to eliminate the things you don't want,"

sagely recommended May. "After you've married Alphonse, you'll find out that at least marriage wasn't the thing you wanted."

Zoe had been hoping fervently that Julie would not marry Alphonse. She didn't want Julie to marry anybody, for where could there be found the god worthy of her?

"At least I'll know," agreed Julie laconically, "and I don't think I want to go through another winter of . . . fussing over men. They're not worth it. Zoe, don't you start it."

"But I only wanted to find out how you interested people who weren't interested in you," Zoe protested. "I—I ought to know in my work."

Maisie giggled at this and Zoe frowned at her.

"If it's a question of using a man—that's different," Margot Waite said. "I mean if you want to get advanced in your work—wasn't that what you meant?"

"Y—yes."

"Ask Amy Bruce," suggested May Roberts. "She's got some beau of hers to star her in a new play—Amy who was never in anything but a summer stock company in her whole life."

"She wouldn't stop at much," Olive said darkly.

There was no one, apparently, to defend Amy's scruples. Zoe puzzled over the difference between Amy Bruce's methods of getting men and these other girls' method. Amy played for big stakes—career, honor, reputation. If she

lost one for the other, Amy probably regarded it as a fair loss for a fair gain. Julie, Fania, Olive—they considered it as a delicate art instead of a game.

“When it comes right down to it, though,” mused Zoe, “there isn’t much difference in picking them up as Amy does and trapping them in the way these girls do. Amy just carries things a step farther.”

“Poor Amy!” exclaimed Fania. “I suppose temptation just swept her off her feet. But I’ll bet she was mighty flattered when he told her his base intentions. Insults are such a tribute.”

“Julie,” Zoe asked thoughtfully, “how much will you take for your gray georgette? You know—the one you never wear—with the chiffon ruffles?”

CHAPTER IX

MR. HENRY C. BERGMAN, president of the Bergman Advertising Company, had actually asked to see Miss Bourne of the copy writing department in his private office. This, as every one knew, meant a raise or—but there was no reason for Miss Bourne to be fired, so it must be a raise.

Zoe went into the presence, trembling. If she were to be fired! But Mr. Bergman, fat and sleek in his snug gray suit, his ruddy jowls sagging over his snowy collar, looked to Zoe's apprehensive eye too calm to have any such thunderbolt up his sleeve. He wheeled around in his chair and gave her a patronizing nod. Mr. Bergman did not believe in letting his employees forget that they were, after all, his employees.

"Miss Bourne? Sit down, please. Miss Bourne, just what motive did you have in choosing advertising as your profession?"

"Oh, it was quite accidental, Mr. Bergman. You see, I wanted to be a playwright, but I had to take the work in the filing room——"

Mr. Bergman ignored this and frowned slightly at her interruption.

"Because you knew it was the coming pro-

fession, did you not? An unploughed field, as it were. The great opportunity for trained service. And of course, you had heard there was big money in it."

"I knew that——"

"Big money in it," repeated Mr. Bergman, riding over Zoe's voice relentlessly. "But it takes brains to get to the top."

Here he smiled self-consciously and looked down at his plump white hand. It was evident that at least his hands had not been required in the business of getting to the top.

"The advertising manager of the Trust Reserve Company gets a salary of one hundred thousand dollars a year," he said impressively, emphasizing his words by tapping his pencil on his desk. "The man at the Green-Coles Company makes nearly one quarter of a million dollars annually. But that is nothing compared to salaries received by many other advertising men of my acquaintance. I tell you, Miss Bourne, there's big money in it. Big money. That is, of course, if you care to stick to it."

Zoe's eyes glowed hopefully. She clasped her hands in her lap and waited to see what the big money in advertising had to do with herself. Perhaps——

"That's what I want to know now, Miss Bourne. Are you, or are you not, vitally interested in the advertising profession?"

"Y—yes, oh yes," quaked Zoe. Perhaps she

was to be taken into the firm. Mr. Bergman was studying her as if he had some such tremendous plan in his head.

"Good. It is a practice of mine never to offer encouragement where it would not be appreciated. What I want to say is that the Voorhees Cold Cream Company has spoken so well of your work that I am going to increase your salary——"

He paused and Zoe saw visions of herself receiving two or three hundred thousand dollars a year.

"——to thirty-five dollars a week."

Mr. Bergman leaned back in his chair and restored his pencil to his waistcoat pocket. He looked at Zoe benignly to see if she were stunned by this splendid offer.

"Thirty-five dollars!" gasped Zoe, coming down from her dreams of thousands.

"It seems large now," said Mr. Bergman, indulgently, "but I'll wager you will soon find use for all of it. . . . And that will, of course, entail new duties. I am going to entrust to you the full page ad for the Voorhees account in the *Ladies' Home Companion*. It should be ready by Friday. Mr. Cornell will assist you in the details. Good day, Miss Bourne."

Zoe went over to her desk, her head buzzing with excitement. The raise wasn't startling but it was encouraging, while the thought of doing an important piece of work like the *Companion*

ad—that, truly, was thrilling. She whispered the news to Cornell, but oddly enough, he only grumbled.

“Won’t it be glorious doing the whole page?” Zoe whispered glowingly. “They’ve been using such stupid, conventional ads in the magazines. I’ve been wild to get a chance at them. I have one idea that I’m positive——”

“Don’t be too excited,” advised Cornell tolerantly. “There’ll be some catch in it, I’ll bet. The old man doesn’t let anybody go ahead on their own even if they have a good idea. He always wants to putter around, too, and spoil everything.”

The tall, dried-up, clerical man who wrote the automobile ads leaned toward Zoe and shook his head warningly.

“Don’t get too fond of any of your ideas. Bergman will break your heart.”

“You mean he’ll laugh at them?” anxiously asked Zoe.

He shook his head.

“Worse. He won’t pay any attention to them.”

But Zoe, after a few minutes’ eager consultation with Cornell, started off on her ad that was, she felt, to make her famous. She wished that she could have it signed, so that every one—even people in Albon—could see how splendid she had become. Mr. Kane, too, would see what she really could do after he had made the oppor-

tunity for her. Cornell would certainly be impressed.

It must be something that would, as Mr. Bergman often put it, strike the woman in the home right in the eye. Something that would show them beauty was as close at hand as their—well, as their broomstick. Beauty and the Broomstick, Beauty on a Broomstick, Beauty versus Broomstick. The words raced around Zoe's brain with a trail of suggestion. She began to write, glowing.

It took another day before the ad was in shape and then Zoe felt that it was perfect. There could be no doubt about it, the thing was the most alluring advertisement that any cold cream could possibly have. She had sketched in the suggestion of an illustration which the artist would do and she was fairly bursting with pride over the thing. She saw Mr. Kane in the office and she longed to show him, but it would be more fun to wait until the proof sheets were ready. So the copy was laid demurely on Mr. Bergman's desk and Zoe could not write another thing all day, she was so agitated over the prospect of Mr. Bergman's praise, when he should read the copy and call her into his office.

The morning passed.

Mr. Bergman went into his office. Zoe could scarcely take her eyes from his door. But when he did come out he was in company with Mr. Kane and he did not speak to her at all. The

afternoon went with agonizing slowness. Each time a visitor went into the president's office, Zoe could have wrung her hands with annoyance at the interruption. But five o'clock came and no summons for the brilliant young writer who had done the superb copy for the *Ladies' Home Companion*.

Zoe dejectedly got her desk in readiness to go home and was closing it when Peggy, the pretty secretary who had a disconcerting air of knowing everything about the office, came in with a type-written note for her.

Zoe read the note with a sinking heart. It informed her that she was to prepare two ads with *punch* for the *Companion*, to be ready at ten in the morning. Did it mean that the Broomstick ad had been flatly turned down as lacking in punch? That seemed to be it. Or perhaps he had not even looked at her work. As a matter of fact, that was something like the truth, but not being certain of it, Zoe could only wail over the injustice done her beautiful copy. It wasn't fair. They should have given it a chance.

Zoe slumped home on the subway and gloomily worked in her room all that evening on two ads with punch. Maisie and Julie left her strictly alone. At two o'clock she sighed and put the completed drafts into the pocket of her coat. (She hadn't come to the brief-case stage yet.)

At noon the next day, unable to bear the suspense any longer, Zoe caught Bergman just as he was dashing into his office. Her hopes for her original ad had risen overnight and since Bergman himself seemed to be in such excellent spirits, she thought there was a bare chance——

“Mr. Bergman,” she called, slightly flushed with her own presumption, “about that Voorhees page——”

“I am delighted with it,” he beamed, his oily face shining with satisfaction. “Mr. Voorhees and I had a conference last night and we evolved a stupendous thing. Oh, it’s big—big.”

“Was it the Broomstick one?” Zoe asked breathlessly.

“The what? Yes, Voorhees is pleased, delighted. Just this great sweep of white paper, mind you, and then——” Mr. Bergman’s eyes glowed with artistic fervor, and he lowered his voice to a dramatic hiss——“at the very bottom of the page in big caps—VOORHEES COLD CREAM FOR THE PORES! Do you see the thing, Miss Bourne? Does it get you? Oh, it’s big—*big!*”

And Mr. Bergman whirled into his office and beamingly dismissed her. Zoe, disillusioned concerning the glorious profession of advertising, went back to her desk and scowled.

“Just part of their Montessori system,” Cornell said, when she told him about it. “Let the

children think they're helping. It keeps them happy and out of mischief."

He gave her an impersonal smile, and got up to go to lunch.

The three older men in the room took it as a signal. Tall, lanky, solemn-faced Mr. Crawford reached for his hat and topcoat just over Zoe's desk with a mumbled apology to her. Plump, rosy Mr. Milton followed Crawford's example. Mr. Milton wrote copy, but his chief virtue was his ability to sell the firm. Prospective clients instinctively trusted Mr. Milton. He joked and smoked and got drunk with them, carried them away by his ineffable enthusiasm over their business and gave them a Big Selling Idea. The third man, Allan Myers, was a weary-eyed young essayist turned ad-writer. He joined the other men and the four stood for a minute talking over something of a distinctly hilarious nature. Zoe was fascinated, as women always are when they see groups of men together enjoying themselves. She felt that she loved them all, for a man in a group seems to take on the virtues or attractive vices of the others and seems far more interesting and inaccessible than when taken alone. How pleasantly powerful a wife must feel who has the right to walk in and interrupt their good time! Women in groups never enjoy their comradeship like that—nearly all of them are secretly bored.

It was then that Peggy came in to add to Zoe's

gloom. Peggy was pretty and had a way with men. She was the sort women hate, because no matter how sure they are of their own sweet-hearts or husbands, they have an instinctive feeling that Peggy could get them if she so wished. Zoe hated her because Cornell always made such a fuss over her.

"She's going to lunch with me, boys, so stand off," Cornell declared, sliding into his overcoat. "Go on, get your things on, Peggy. It's nearly twelve-thirty and if we don't get out now these fellows will all want to come along."

Peggy's wide violet eyes opened even wider. Her delicious little smile revealed itself.

"Aren't you sure of yourself, though? Wait outside by the elevator. Mr. Bergman might not like me to go out with you. He'd think it wasn't the right business attitude."

Zoe sniffed. But every one else roared at the remarkable bit of repartee.

"Lucky Cornell," said Milton.

"Yes, isn't he?" said Peggy, and again every one shouted with appreciation. Men laugh at the stupidest things, Zoe reflected.

Cornell went out and the three men, after conspiring in whispers, took their hats and tiptoed out. Mr. Milton threw a humorous glance at Zoe.

"Blah!" Zoe reflected contemptuously, sitting alone in the office, "men make me sick. Glad I've decided never to get married. Just

seeing men behave like that over a vain, stupid little stenographer is enough. She does have a certain aliveness about her. But then I have that, too. I wonder what it is that men like. It isn't just prettiness. I could have that if I took some pains and studied Julie's system. It's something else, though."

Zoe sat with her chin in her hands, frowning out of the window over Madison Square Park, where peripatetic bootblacks, jobless men, swaggering office girls, pinch-backed clerks floated in noon-hour idleness. A pretty young lady surrounded by four mirthful gentlemen presently walked across the park on her way to a certain restaurant favored by advertising men. But Zoe did not see them. She sat wishing that she had that "something else."

CHAPTER X

AFTER all, Zoe was glad she was left in the office alone, for she was slowly working up a profound sympathy for herself and at any moment she might begin to weep. All alone in New York, and with no friends! (She was able to brush the girls aside with a gesture, for after all they didn't really care about her!) And such a little bit of money to go on! Thirty-five dollars a week couldn't buy you New York. And then to have her hopes for a splendid coup in the *Companion* ad dashed to the ground! Of course that might have been bearable if it hadn't been for Cornell taking Peggy out like that, absolutely oblivious to her own attractions.

Men were detestable. All the more so because they persisted in crowding into your thoughts when you really wanted to give all your attention to making a success in the world.

"He isn't a bit clever, anyway." Zoe tried the old stunt of analyzing her desire in order to make it vanish. "He's nothing but a great, stupid, handsome beast!"

Oddly enough this characterization did not make her scornful, as she had planned, but caused her mouth to curve tenderly.

"No brain to him at all. How he even got into

advertising is a mystery to me, for he isn't the type at all," she went on, a little less viciously, but with the same intent to destroy her illusions. "Nothing fine or brilliant or unusual. Just normal. And all physical."

With this condemnation, paradoxically enough, her eyes became soft and luminous, dreamily retrospective.

"Simply a handsome beast."

Zoe shook off, virtuously, the compelling charm of the words. It was unthinkable that an intelligent girl could not put her mind to better purpose than this. She hated Cornell. She would treat him, hereafter, with an indifferent coolness. The thing was to think constantly of her work, of her plans for future fame. She would become a famous writer and perhaps, when he sought her acquaintance later on, she would smile a faint, superior smile.

No, it was all nonsense permitting herself to be concerned whether a man did or did not notice her. That wasn't what she had come to New York for. She had come to be a great writer, a playwright or possibly a novelist. Men had no place in her life, except as occasional companions. Certainly her thoughts were too valuable to be wasted on a handsome, masculine face. Why, he wasn't even as clever as she herself was! You could tell.

She wanted to strip herself of all these weaknesses. Why couldn't she be absolutely inde-

pendent, moving ruthlessly on to her destiny, unstirred by sex or other externals? Zoe clenched her fists. She would! She would! She would be cold, she would be icily indifferent to all men. Julie said it made you much more attractive to them. There it was again! One couldn't be impervious to men without that damnable feminine consciousness whispering that imperviousness was a wonderful bait.

"Sex—sex. It gets in the way of everything," sighed Zoe wearily. If one could only deny it and concentrate on a great goal. She drooped gloomily over her desk.

Kane, at that moment stepping into the room, stopped short at the pathetic picture before him—the slim, lonely, young creature in brown, bowed with the weight of unknown sorrows. It was the Bourne girl, he knew, that flashing little dark thing he had recently put into the copy room. The absurd thought struck him that her evident grief might be that of an artist condemned to commercialize her genius.

He took a few deliberate puffs at his pipe before he spoke, his gray eyes studying Zoe with concern.

"You're not taking advertising as seriously as all that?" he asked finally, strolling toward her.

Zoe sat up straight. Her face, set in resolute lines, relaxed unexpectedly into a smile as she looked into Kane's face. Why—why, how

nice he was! There was a humorous understanding in his eyes that warmed her strangely. She had seen little of him since their first encounter and she was surprised now to find herself drawn toward him. She found that she liked the flecks of gray in his brown hair, the amused crinkles about his eyes and the strong, yet oddly sensitive mouth.

"No," she explained, ruefully, "it's not advertising but myself that I take seriously."

"Worse and worse."

Kane puffed slowly at his pipe, leaning against her desk. He was glad, at least, that she had not been crying as he had suspected. His lazy silence gave Zoe the comforting assurance that nothing could interest him more than for her to talk about her troubles. For an instant she forgot that the base of them lay in Bill Cornell's taking Peggy out to lunch.

"I want to be an individual," she confessed, frowning. "You know—a—a person, instead of just part of the crowd. And it's so hard."

Kane lifted his eyebrows and Zoe hastened on.

"It's so discouraging to find that the same thing that bothers the crowd bothers you—like environment and family and sex—and—oh, it's so hard to explain!"

Kane said nothing, but Zoe found his silent smoking more encouraging than words.

"I thought I could become a real individual

when I came to New York," she went on. "Of course it was impossible for me to be one in Albon—that's my home town, you know. People that want to do something—well, tremendous, back there are taken as jokes. It's true. The attitude is, 'Yes, a fine artist you'd make, what with your father one of the shiftless McGillicuddies and never able to do a thing.' So you have to repress yourself if you stay there or else come to New York."

"In New York, then," Kane inquired curiously, "there are no repressions?"

Zoe nodded in eager conviction.

"It's the place people come to do the thing they've always wanted to do. Sometimes you don't get to do it right away, but you feel as if you were very close to it. I want to write plays and become famous. I'm only writing ads now, but I feel as if I were very close to the other. I want to live and to know everything." She described a wide circle in the air, "Everything. After that I will be able to write big, gripping things, don't you think?"

Kane had taken his pipe from his lips and a queer, soft smile played about his mouth. He fumbled in his pocket and, drawing out his tobacco, slowly filled his pipe. His eyes met Zoe's intense, questing gaze.

"I am sure of it," he said. "You are very young, aren't you?"

"Nearly twenty-three," said Zoe seriously.

"You know twenty-three is old in the Middle West, and if you're going to be a person you ought to be pretty well started by that time. Girls are past the marrying age, everybody thinks, and since that's the only thing they can do besides teach, or work in the library, or go into the dry-goods store, why they're simply shelved. I didn't want to be shelved so I ran away. I wanted to get acquainted with Life, and crowd the next six years full of wonderful things. Then, if I didn't amount to anything by that time, I'd be content to be shelved. Thirty is the proper age for shelving."

Kane's eyebrows went up again. Zoe remembered Julie and the girls at Mrs. Horne's who, even at thirty, seemed to give no evidence of being ready to be shelved, and stopped short.

"Perhaps thirty-five," she amended.

Kane laughed outright.

"And when you're thirty you'll push it on to forty," he told her, half sadly. "I've just pushed it on to forty myself. Meantime I move with the crowd. But you would say that men are different."

"Men are," declared Zoe. "They're never shelved until they're dead. Thirty is really the most important age for women, though. They have to be started toward fame or a family by that time, and if they're not, they're done for. So you see it's very necessary that I should crowd the next few years."

"To what end," asked Kane, studying her intent face, "the family?"

Zoe shuddered.

"No, no," she assured him, and added reminiscently, "I was on the verge of it twice in the last four years back in Albon. It makes me shiver to think how close I came to it. It was after I had to give up college—I only went a year—and my brothers and sisters and everybody waited for me to do something. But there wasn't anything wonderful for me to do in Albon and I saw I'd never get anywhere as society editor of the Albon paper, so in sheer desperation I got engaged. He was the only person I could get engaged to, as the other six eligible men were all picked out by six of the forty or so eligible girls."

"What happened?" Kane asked, interestedly.

"I got panicky," Zoe confided. "I was horrid to him and he went and made one of the other forty happy right away. Then last year I weakened again. You do get desperate, you know, with every one watching you and thinking you're due for spinsterhood, and so I got engaged to the young man who'd come to work in the shoe store. But I got faint-hearted as the wedding day approached. The family hated me when I backed out again. It sort of reflects on the family, you know, to have old maids in it. One of the forty—only it was sixty or seventy by this time—got him, too. Wasn't I lucky to have a vacillating disposition?"

"I think you were," Kane agreed. "You should congratulate yourself on making the first steps toward individuality."

"I have done something then, haven't I?" Zoe asked him, anxiously. "Different from the crowd, I mean. I did overcome one of the established things, didn't I? Marriage, I mean."

"Of course you did," Kane answered. "It should give you faith in your power to overcome the rest."

Zoe pondered this. There it was. Sex had gotten in her path before and she had swept it ruthlessly aside and marched on. She could do it again. She would refuse to think of love or Cornell, except as an abstract word and a co-worker in her office respectively.

As for Kane, smiling down at her, he was glad he had spoken to her. He had wanted to talk to her, to hear her story ever since she came in that day. She was so eager and buoyant, as if she had made herself a chalice for all of life to pour through. He had been like that ten—or was it fifteen?—years ago. His eye took in the vividness of her thin, absorbed face. She had thanked him once for plucking her from the ghastly monotony of routine office work. He would have liked to do more for her. One felt that way about these scarlet-seeking young ones.

Zoe's eyes strayed toward the window. She thought it was kind of Kane to let her run on like this, when he had so many important things

to do. At the moment it seemed perfectly natural. He did not seem old today, even if he was nearly thirty-five, as Maisie had said. She was relieved, too, to find some one with whom she could talk about herself. The girls at Mrs. Horne's were always so full of their own stories. But one doesn't like to listen all the time.

"Some day we must have lunch together," said Kane, haltingly. "Do you think——"

He glanced at his watch and suggested that they go out that very minute, but Zoe, after her first exclamation of pleasure, was reminded that Maisie was probably waiting for her in their usual lunching place at that moment. She got up and put on her hat reluctantly. She was afraid Kane thought she had stayed in to angle for his invitation and flushed brilliantly at the thought. After all he was one of the most important persons of the office, and here—what a frightful thing for her to do!—she had for some reason confided in him as if she had known him all her life. Zoe was aghast at her familiarity, as her mind went back over their conversation. How could she have dared say all those things, when they had barely exchanged a dozen words before? Telling him about Frank and Cliff that way—things she had not talked about even to Julie or Maisie. She bit her lip and burned with embarrassment.

Kane still stood by her desk, his pipe in his mouth, watching her casually. He was afraid

his offer had vaguely offended her. She might have some queer feeling about his being married or some such thing as that. Well, he wouldn't speak of it again, if it embarrassed her. She stimulated him, though, by her zest for things. Such a flaming little creature, her arms out eager to be hurt by life.

Kane turned and went back to his own office.

CHAPTER XI

ZOE ran into Miss Tait one morning on Forty-Second Street. She had to look twice before she recognized her, for the little old lady fairly shone with new clothes—a purple-plumed hat, a mink-collared coat, white gloves and a round dab of rouge in her thin, unaccustomed cheeks to give the final touch to her costume. She was almost scampering along the street in her suppressed excitement. She looked bursting with secrets.

Zoe stared at her curiously before she hailed her.

“You look very gay, Miss Tait. Is it a party?”

Miss Tait turned around hastily.

“Why, hello, my dear. How are you? No, it’s not a party. It’s—it’s an interview. A really very important one for me.”

Her usually drab, colorless voice had taken on quite a dominating quality and Zoe wondered what the cause of it was.

“It’s with Mary Pickford. . . . Please don’t cry out like that, my dear. It upsets me so, when I’m in this mood. So much depends, you know . . . really, my whole future.”

“Oh, yes, you want to write scenarios,” Zoe

remembered Miss Tait's bug and smiled sympathetically. "Does it really bring you in touch with the big film people? How nice!"

Miss Tait coughed.

"Well, I can't say that I've actually ever met any of them—yet. That's what has kept me from getting ahead. If you don't see the stars themselves, you can't sell your scenarios at all. It's very distressing, my dear. Sometimes one does get discouraged. Sometimes I simply pack my trunks and go back to the Nashville Library. I have a very good position there, but anyone can be a librarian."

"But you always come back to New York," Zoe smiled.

Miss Tait sighed.

"Yes, I always come back. It's so foolish of me, you see, to waste my time with books when I could be making twenty or thirty thousand a year writing photoplays. Really criminal to neglect such a chance. But now everything is splendid. I expect to be connected with Miss Pickford's company by the first of the year. I don't mind telling you, Zoe, that the thing is as good as settled. A friend of my brother's in Brooklyn knows Miss Pickford's scenario director and has given me a letter to her arranging for the interview. He told me to go over to the hotel this morning—she's in town, you know—and I couldn't miss her."

"It does sound promising," said Zoe.

Miss Tait's small, worried face registered annoyance.

"Promising? It's as good as settled. You see she's at the hotel and I have the letter of introduction that can't fail. . . . Last year my cousin in California met the Gish girls and spoke of me, so that when they came on I called to see them. But they were busy all the time, packing to go back to Hollywood, I think . . . and so I missed that opportunity or probably I should be with their company at this minute. Then the year before I had a letter to Mr. Chaplin from the librarian in Memphis who had met him once. Not that I do his sort of thing, but one could adapt one's style. . . . However, he was taken ill with tonsillitis here and they wouldn't admit visitors."

"Do you think you ought to count too much on this interview with Mary Pickford?" asked Zoe, tentatively.

Miss Tait's brows drew together fretfully.

"I told you it was settled, didn't I? My dear, when you've been in pictures as long as I have, you'll know when a thing's settled! Does my hat look all right?"

"Beautiful," Zoe said, and then stood for a moment, speculatively watching the little spinster bustle across the street and up Fifth Avenue. Funny that a woman that old—she must be at least fifty or sixty—would keep on with such absurd hopes. Of course she wouldn't see the

star, and if she did it wouldn't get her anywhere. Sixty, too! Wasn't there an age of reason, any more?

Rowena Shay had arrived at Mrs. Horne's for her customary month's New York preparation for lyceum work. Rowena, it was carefully explained to Zoe, was one of the few successful theatrical members of Mrs. Horne's "family." Not that she'd ever been on Broadway, but she had actually earned a living for nearly three years through the drama. Rowena told Zoe that she had always—ever since infancy—been interested in the drama, and had taken prizes in elocution as far back as she could remember. This predilection, coupled with what seemed to every one else unbearable perseverance, had resulted in her getting to the top in a comparatively short time. And so we see her now billed in over one thousand towns as "Rowena Shay, Reader," for the Blue Valley Lyceum Company.

"Even after I became successful," she confided to Zoe in Enna's room—Enna had gone to Washington for a fortnight and had sublet her room, "I never stopped with my exercises. If one wants to succeed in drama one has to keep up. You and Maisie and Julie will have to excuse me if you hear me going through my vowel sounds every morning, because vowel sounds are simply everything to an artist. You won't mind?"

Zoe and Maisie, seated on the foot of

Rowena's bed, assured her of their sympathy with such devotion to art. Rowena was thumbing over the script of her new "vehicle" and preparing to rehearse. She felt none of the novice's hesitation over practicing in public. The drama was too serious a matter to consider extraneous things. Besides, in Rowena's home town in Arkansas, her practicing was so impressive an occasion to her small brothers and sisters that she had become a bit vain over it. It was so—well, so professional. She handed the script to Zoe after glancing hurriedly through it.

"You catch me up on any slips. You see I read this entire play from memory. You watch my tones and if I sound nasal you must stop me at once and I will correct myself. Or if I forget my *r*'s."

"Forget your *r*'s?" repeated Zoe, stupidly.

"I mean if I—forget to—ah—forget them. You have to, you know. It is so—well, in dramatic work the *r* sound is so bourgeois, if you know what I mean. First, though, I must work out my business."

She looked at Zoe to see how the phrase affected her, but Zoe was going through the manuscript and failed to respond. So she coughed and laughed self-consciously.

"Of course you wouldn't know what business meant—that's simply the facial expression and your actions as you speak."

"Oh, yes," murmured Zoe. Maisie had begun to squirm and, seeing the thickness of the manuscript in Zoe's hand, decided on retreat.

"Sorry, Ro," she said, getting up and sidling across the hall, "I have to wash some things. But I'll be right here, you know, and I'll hear every word. I'll help Zoe trip you up."

"You mean, see that I don't get tripped up," corrected Rowena. She frowned slightly as Maisie went out, then, with quick, decisive movements, twisted a chair a quarter of an inch, stepped back and viewed the effect keenly, then twisted it back an eighth of an inch with great care.

"This," she explained, "is the fireplace."

Rowena studied the chair through half-closed lids. Then she turned brightly to Zoe. She gave her head a quick, thorough shake, as if to throw off her personality and, by tremendous artistry, dive into the atmosphere of another world. Raising her right hand and falling back a step, she began her series "to get oiled up," she laughingly explained.

"Anger," quickly letting her head and arm droop. "Resentment," raising both hands slightly, third finger leading downward. "Hope" and on, by miraculous changes of expression, through "Irritation," "Dignity," "Flirtation," "Passion," and "Appeal."

"Is that the prologue?" asked Zoe, staring.

"Mercy, no. Just the exercises I was speak-

ing of. Now let's begin. Remember about the nasal tones and my *r's*." Rowena stepped back two paces, lifted her head, placed her feet squarely apart, her hands, in the new manner, calmly at her side, and in a changed voice, a clear, ringing, lyceum voice, began her reading.

"The scene is laid in the library of Colonel Winter's home in Richmond, Virginia. To the right (gesture) we have a long French window, leading out to the rose garden. To the left (gesture) is a door leading into the dining room. Beside this door (half-turn body) is a long, comfortably upholstered bench, flanked by a library table on one side and a footstool on the other. Directly in the rear is a door opening on a balcony. Windows are on either side of this door, through which may be seen an old-fashioned apple orchard. (Smile here) Beside the door on the right (gesture) is a blazing fire (rub hands here, eyes sparkling), beside which is a sofa. As the curtain rises, the sound of a bell is heard and Major Willard is seen outside the rear door. Through the dining room comes little Mary Winter (smile indulgently here to signify youth), who hastens to the door and opens it.

"(In a deep voice) Ah—ah—is the Kuhnelt in?

"(Falsetto, snapping eyes and bowing with childish self-consciousness) No, he isn't, but I know you must be Majah Willard because Fathah has always spoken of you.

“(Deep, rolling laugh) So youah fathah has always spoken of me, has he? Well, well, that’s only natural since we’ve been podners these twenty yahs. And you—why, you must be little Mary Winter—Wintah.

“(Falsetto laugh, with twisting of hands behind back, and shy response)—Yes, I’m little Mary, or Poll—that’s what Fathah calls me.”

It seemed to Zoe that she had never heard such an endless performance, and Rowena herself began to tire before the end with the demands made upon her talented vocal chords, changing from little Mary’s nasal soprano to the Major’s deep, jovial tones, and then to Mrs. Winter’s low, rippling, Southern-hostess drawl with its mellow laughter, and again to the Colonel’s character voice. There was, too, the Major’s son’s voice, alert, cheery, full of personal magnetism. Rowena was constantly mixing them up, having Mrs. Winter speak in the juvenile soprano, and Major Willard speak in the perfect hostess voice. Zoe was getting much confused when Rowena saved the situation by stopping short.

“I’m afraid,” she enunciated, looking keenly at Zoe, “that my last pronunciation of Winter sounded a little nasal. I shall test it.”

“How?” Zoe was open-mouthed.

Rowena smiled enigmatically and picked up a box of matches from the table in the clean-cut manner that magicians use in handling their

equipment. (You can see, ladies and gentlemen, that I conceal nothing from you.) Then she struck a match and, holding it in front of her nose, majestically pronounced the word, "Wintah—Win-tah," four times. Zoe, staring, expected to see a rabbit emerge from the flames. The match went out and Rowena scowled.

"What was that for?" demanded Zoe.

"Just the test for nasality," said Rowena, off-handedly. "If your tone is nasal—and you've no idea what a handicap being born in Arkansas is—it will blow the match out, or maybe if it isn't nasal it will blow it out." She scratched her forehead perplexedly, "I seem to have forgotten. But I believe it proves that my tone was not nasal in saying the word 'Wintah.' I never hesitate to test myself, though. If I find myself lapsing into an error of diction or elocution I stop short—just as I did this time, and go over with the greatest care the phrase at issue."

"Quite right," murmured Zoe, humbly. She looked anxiously toward Maisie's open door. If only Maisie would come in now, saying there was a telegram for her or something. It was really too much to sit through Rowena's next two acts. Good, fat acts they were, too, as Zoe could see. Rowena had barely started the second act—(The drawing room of Major Willard's apartment in uptown New York. Japanese valet. Supper for two. "You may go, Toto."

"Very good, sir. And shall I return, sir, to serve the dinner?" etc.)—when Maisie finally took pity on her trapped comrade and threw open the door dramatically, a wet stocking dripping from her hand.

"Rowena!" she shrieked, "drop that *r*!"

Rowena put her hand to her throat.

"Oh, I forgot. I knew I would!" she moaned. "I said din-ner instead of dinnah! Oh, if I had only been born in Boston instead of Arkansas! Zoe, why didn't you stop me?"

"From being born in Arkansas? My dear, I was so far away, what could I do?" gurgled Zoe, edging toward the door. Rowena looked hurt. Zoe composed herself.

"I think I confuse you, Rowena," she managed to say, quietly. "You probably wouldn't have made the mistake if I hadn't been here. I'll slip out and do some work in my room and let you rehearse in peace."

"But——" wailed Rowena, picking up her fallen script.

The door, however, was closed softly but firmly. On the other side of it, two members of the audience rocked silently on the floor.

CHAPTER XII

As Christmas approached, Mrs. Horne's establishment took on an air of hopeless gloom. Dinner became a silent, melancholy affair which Mrs. Horne, with indomitable cheerfulness, tried in vain to brighten. Maisie invited every one to her exhibition of Christmas gifts—a solitary cotton handkerchief, prettily boxed and placed in the center of her dressing table—for presents were as scarce as they are in any other New York boarding house whose inmates have long since cut their home connections. Julie, with a glittering hoop of diamonds from Alphonse, was even gloomier than the others.

"Nobody thinks they're real, 'anyway,'" she muttered in Zoe's ear. "Might as well be glass so far as the world is concerned."

"But the meaning of the thing, Julie!" Zoe protested, rather limply. She had some time ago come to the conclusion that Julie was getting married simply because it looked like a dull season and, besides, she'd tried everything else.

"I wonder what an engagement ring does mean," reflected Julie, pushing aside Mrs. Horne's "Reminiscent Salad," as Maisie called it, with a faint frown of distaste, "I suppose it means something different to each girl."

"To most of them nowadays it's just an orna-

ment," Miss Tait put in, with more than usual spirit. It was plain that Miss Tait had never had one. She had been irritable ever since her interview with Mary Pickford had failed to materialize.

"Probably," said Julie, absently. Julie was cross, too, as her wedding day, which was set for the twenty-ninth, approached. She had faint purple shadows beneath her eyes and her mouth had taken on a nervous, set line. Sometimes she didn't even take the trouble to rouge, and on these occasions her creamy face, under its shock of burnt-gold hair, took on a most becoming ethereal quality. Amy Bruce, in fact, had dropped rouge on the strength of Julie's appearance without it. Her mascaraed eyes and hennaed hair without the rouge, however, gave her a fearful, decadent look which she eventually recognized and hastily remedied.

"Fania invited me to go to her aunt's in Brooklyn over Christmas," Maisie announced importantly, from the other side of the table. "I feel sort of mean leaving Zoe all alone, but gee!"

"Don't bother about Zoe," said Julie, quickly. "Zoe and I are going to have a party all by ourselves. Let me see, tomorrow is Christmas Eve. Well, tomorrow night we'll stage the party, Zoe."

"First I'd heard of it," Zoe said, hopefully. She had not been looking forward much to Christmas alone at Mrs. Horne's. "But, Julie—how about the blushing bridegroom?"

Julie looked mutinous as she answered.

"I told him I was going to Philadelphia to visit my grandfather. Of course I don't have any grandfather in Philadelphia, but I simply had to have one good time before I got married. Not that I don't love Alphonse——"

"If you loved him, I guess you wouldn't mind spending Christmas with him," muttered Miss Tait.

Julie ignored her.

"But I want to feel free—just free—for one more time before I—before I——" Julie's lip trembled. One would have thought that getting married was the great renunciation act, that Julie was bidding farewell to joy, as she entered into that state.

"Good!" exclaimed Zoe, in great relief. "What shall we do? Will it cost a lot?"

Julie looked vague.

"Oh, we'll do something, never fear."

Her plans were not even more certain as they dressed late the next afternoon to go out to dinner. For the occasion, Julie had pillaged Enna's closet, that person having gone off to an obscure uncle's in Albany. So there was a smart hat with a brim of monkey fur for Zoe and a sleek black coat for Julie. Julie, too, decided that Zoe could wear her own exquisitely tailored green coat with its monkey fur collar splashing under her chin seductively.

"Every one else will have men, of course,"

Julie said, as they started out shortly after seven, looking, as they both thought after a glance in the elevator mirror, immaculately and well-groomed. They glanced at the mail desk in the reception hall and at the six or seven post cards there; they looked up and met each other's eyes with the same thought. Christmas was queer, indeed, when the mail for twenty girls was as skimpy as that.

"This just come, Miss Bo'n, fo' you," Zoe heard the elevator boy behind her saying. She turned around and took a square box from him.

"Thorley's!" Julie peeked over her shoulder and read the name written in the corner. "Zoe, what have you been keeping from me? Who is sending you flowers?"

Zoe was looking down at the flawless corsage of violets in the box, her mouth agape.

"Julie, who——who, do you suppose?" She looked at Julie helplessly and then a swift thought came. "Christopher Kane—or—but it couldn't be Bill Cornell."

"Why not?"

Zoe slowly fastened the corsage at her waist. She was tremulous with the thrill of her first flowers. How beautiful New York was! In Albon no one ever would have sent her flowers.

"Oh, I don't know. I just can't imagine him thinking of it, that's all. It couldn't be anybody else but Mr. Kane, and yet it seems odd that he

should go to all that trouble for me. He probably thought I'd be lonesome."

Julie looked at her.

"But isn't he married?"

"Yes," said Zoe, "but this is just business, I think. A little welfare work, I suppose, for a girl alone in New York. Anyway, he isn't exactly a married man because they don't live together."

She was thinking how nice it was of Mr. Kane to remember her and how beautiful it made one feel to wear flowers.

Julie said nothing more and they walked toward Broadway where electric signs glowed through a mist of soft, wet snow. Limousines and taxis padded along on their chained tires over the damp pavements. In front of the big apartment houses and hotels, awnings were thrown out, under which ladies in pastel, furred evening cloaks glittered from the door to their waiting cars, on the arms of men in opera hats whose white shirts gleamed through half-open cloaks. Julie and Zoe, hurrying along, heard imperious commands to taxi-drivers—"Palais Royale!" "Moulin Rouge!" "Montmartre!" "Voisins!"

"You can tell the kind they are by the places they're going to," Julie whispered in Zoe's ear, "whether they're the real thing or just trying to be it."

They were passing a cigar store when a man

in evening clothes, his hat tilted in a jovial fashion over one eyebrow, emerged and waved frantically to a taxi just sliding over toward Bretton Hall, empty of its cargo.

"Bertolotti's!" he cried, and jumped on the running board before the taxi stopped.

"There goes a real person," Julie declared. "Anybody that goes down to Bertolotti's on Christmas Eve. . . . Let's go down there."

"Subway?" inquired Zoe, as they approached the Eighty-sixth Street station.

Julie hesitated.

"I've got four dollars. Have you got any? Eight? Good. Let's take a taxi down and see what the town looks like tonight. Only they always soak you so on Christmas Eve."

A yellow taxi sidled along and a fat, puffy gentleman with a fat, puffy lady hurried out to catch it, but Julie laid her hand restrainingly on the man's arm.

"My taxi," she said coldly and, beckoning Zoe, stepped into the car, leaving the fat couple staring indignantly after them. The chauffeur grinned.

"Bertolotti's," commanded Julie.

"Sure we oughtn't to be in evening dress for Bertolotti's?" asked Zoe, settling Enna's hat on her black hair.

"Wait till you see the sawdust on the floor," laughed Julie. Her pre-marital gloom had vanished and she was the gay, adventuresome Julie

that Zoe had first known. Zoe, too, had forgotten that the advertising job was not going so smoothly these days, that a new girl had come into the copy room and no one paid any attention to her any more, except possibly Mr. Kane, and that Bill Cornell seemed to have fallen out of an affair with Peggy into an affair with the vivacious new girl. She was simply living in this Christmas Eve, and everything seemed intoxicatingly beautiful because there were her first flowers at her waist. She was happy to be with Julie, and only unhappy when she remembered that Julie would be gone in another four or five days, gone with Alphonse. Zoe did not like Alphonse, because he seemed to think he owned Julie, when Julie really belonged to her—Zoe Bourne.

Their taxi slid along the street past other taxis and limousines through whose windows one caught glimpses of painted women laughing with shadowy men. In the theatrical district automobiles, street cars, and sight-seeing busses were packed so tightly that they seemed to take an hour to every block. At Forty-fourth Street the traffic-policeman stopped them, and Zoe and Julie, leaning out, saw a small crowd collected around a policeman and an aged beggar.

"Isn't he cruel to make him move on when it's Christmas?" flared up Zoe.

A man standing at the curb, hardly a foot away, turned at Zoe's words and half smiled.

"He ain't cruel, miss," he said. "This guy's made nearly half a million begging and the cop's got the dope on him and is sending him up to let the other guys have a chance in the trade."

Julie and Zoe exclaimed in astonishment. The downtown traffic was released again, and they moved on toward Greenwich Village, leaving the millionaire beggar to fight his battle with the law.

At Herald Square they had easier sailing and rode down under the elevated track to West Third Street, to Bertolotti's very door. From inside the swinging doors of the basement came a continuous uproar, and Julie, as they started down the steps, whispered that they might not be able to get in downstairs. But a party was coming out the door just as they entered and Julie rushed Zoe to a long table in the very midst of the low-ceilinged room, where there were two vacant chairs.

Three elderly men and two seedy, but nevertheless joyous women sat at the table, and when Julie and Zoe sat down with them they greeted the newcomers vociferously.

"Other people didn't like us. Went away. Uptown," one of the men vouchsafed eagerly to Zoe. "But you'll like us. Just you see. You and your friend."

"Ask him how we can get some wine," Julie hissed in Zoe's ear.

The gentleman gave a knowing wink and produced a large flask from his pocket.

"Carry own scenery, little girl. Carry own scenery," he observed, cunningly. "Eh wot, George? George and Tom and me, we've been in every place in town with our little friends since three this afternoon." George and Tom nodded solemn corroboration and the speaker turned to Zoe, generously, "You and your little friend can have some, too, you know. I don't want to be any pig. I said to George and Tom today, I said, 'George,' I said, 'you and Tom and me, we aren't going to be pigs with this just because we're rich and influential and can afford to buy it,' I said. And then we came across these two little girls up at the Algonquin and they were hungry and thirsty and George and Tom, they said they looked seedy, but I said, 'I don't care, George, you and Tom and me, we'll just buy them a good square dinner, and give them all the liquor they want like good Christians.' Didn't I say that, George?"

George, with excellent humor, admitted the truth of his friend's words, and, waxing his limp, grayish moustache, applied himself to Julie with the most formal assiduousness. The two women laughed constantly and made much of the large, pink man between them who was apparently "Tom."

"What's the sawdust on the floor?" demanded Zoe of the voluble man on her left.

"Hospital street," offered George, blandly. "See, Al?"

"Silly thing," Al rebuked, gravely, "no hospital street at all. They have sawdust instead of cus—cus—cuspidors. How about a little drink, little girl?"

Zoe didn't think she wanted a drink, but Julie leaned toward her.

"It's all right, Zoe. Let's have some. It's Christmas, anyway. See, everybody's got something with them. It's always the same on Christmas and New Year's and I'm glad of it."

Her face was flushed and Zoe, with some alarm, thought that perhaps Julie was too desperately bent on being free to be discreet.

"'Sgood stuff," one of the women advised Zoe.

After all, Zoe reflected, what were people always on guard for, anyway? Better when you're sixty to have something to regret than to wonder what would have happened if you'd obeyed your impulses. Zoe caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror and was amazed to see how transformed she was in her borrowed costume. She looked an entirely different person, as women always do in a different style of hat than they are used to wearing. Her olive-green coat with its Parisian cut looked svelte and gorgeously subdued.

Zoe accepted the small paper cup that Al proffered, as Julie accepted hers. The thing was to act sophisticated. Zoe, acting sophisticated,

did what George designated as "hooking 'er over," and was amazed to find that no one else was finishing his at a single gulp at all. Al delightedly refilled her cup and Zoe, feeling in excellent spirits, took the second drink with equal speed.

"That's what I said to George, I said for us not to be pigs," Al earnestly repeated. "Only, little girl, you don't want it all, do you?"

"No," Zoe assured him, "that's what I said to Julie. I said, 'Julie, I don't want to be a pig,' I said."

Al applauded this vigorously.

"And now," he announced, "I've arranged—or I'm going to arrange—for a little Christmas program. I want to ask George to recite that little Christmas story. I want George to recite that little Christmas story. George, come on and recite that little Christmas story."

"I will," said Tom. "George can't recite, Al, and you know it. It's me that has the talent."

"Then I'm going to sing Mother Machree," whimpered George, his moustache drooping unhappily, "and I'd rather sing it, anyway."

"Shush! Shush!" Al hissed warningly, so warningly, in fact, that when Tom arose and stood, with one hand resting lightly on his chair, there was a silence over the neighboring tables as well.

"Tell story of fella and a girl," Tom began, a look of determination on his vast, pink face.

"Married. Christmas was coming and fella was broke, and the girl, she was broke, too, on account of their being married. Beautiful white snow was falling," he waved a large, fat hand, helplessly, "like tonight. Beautiful white snow. And he said, he said to his wife, 'Wife,' he said, 'I'm broke, and it's Christmas. Beautiful white snow is falling. But,' he said, 'I guess that doesn't make any difference because, dear wife, I haven't any Christmas present to give you.' Said he didn't have any Christmas present for her. Well, she said she didn't have any for him, only, she said she wished she could give him a watch and chain. Said she could——" he faltered again and made a wide, vague gesture.

"Said she wished she could get him watch and chain," prompted George, and Tom took it up gratefully.

"Watch and chain she said she wished she could give him. But you see——" a look of pained surprise came over Tom's face. He went on determinedly, "Beautiful white snow like tonight was falling. And she gave him beautiful Christmas present—Watch and chain just like I said, and he gave her beautiful gold comb. Beautiful gold comb he gave her. Only——" Tom balanced himself and frowned in a painful effort at remembering. Fortunately his memory had not been affected in the slightest by his drinking, for he wound up triumphantly, "Only

she didn't have any hair. She didn't have any hair. Not a stitch."

He sat down amid thunderous applause, which he rose and acknowledged, long after it had subsided, with a grateful bow and a little speech of appreciation.

Zoe, flushed and excited, had courteously accepted two more "hookers" as Al termed them, and felt impelled to give a recitation of her own. At the moment it seemed the most natural thing in the world to do.

"You can't unless it's about Christmas," said Tom, jealously.

"'Course she can," soothed Al, "you ain't going to be a pig again, are you, Tom?"

Julie, her hat off, clapped feverishly.

"Please, Zoe—please do something. I just love recitations."

Zoe rose and laboriously twisted her chair sidewise. It was queer how light and graceful she felt, how deft her hands seemed to be and yet what a frightful noise that chair made. A dish or something clattered to the floor, too, each time she made a particularly deft motion toward the table.

"'Sfireplace—this chair's fireplace," she explained. "Colonel Winter and the Major apt to come in any minute. Keep it in mind. Ziz the way it goes:

"I'd rather be a nutmeg than a tootsie roll,
I'd rather be a hoptoad than a flea,

And though I'd like to be a set of sideburns, I'd rather be an asafediti."

She sat down to shouts of laughter from other tables. She felt elated and warm inside, but curiously fuzzy in her brain. Al was delighted.

How handsome Al was! What a beautiful restaurant it was! How distinguished looking Tom was—just like an enormous Humpty Dumpty egg. And how gloriously happy she was!

"Rather be a hoptoad, she would," Al repeated, laughing immoderately. "Little girl said she'd rather be an asa-asa-asafediti."

He repeated this, chuckling to himself and beaming at Zoe. Julie, though shaking with laughter, eyed Zoe with some concern.

"Put your coat on, Zoe, we've got to go," she whispered.

"But, Julie, I have to eat a zabelogni," said Zoe, crossly. If that wasn't like a girl to take one right away in the midst of the fun! "Al said I certainly had to eat a zabelogni."

"Can't do it," said Julie, decisively. "We have an engagement at eleven. Come on."

She paid their check and fairly dragged Zoe away, Al and Tom pleading for them to remain.

"I was having such a good time," wailed Zoe.

"It's always the best time to leave, while you're having a good time," said Julie, sagely, "but Al and George were getting along too fast.

Next thing you know we'd all have been perfectly drunk. There's a man speaking to you."

Zoe blinked and looked straight into the eyes of Bill Cornell, who sat with a party of seven or eight near the door. In spite of her dazed state she read in his eyes something she had never read before—interest.

"Man from office," she breathed to Julie, outside, "Bill Cornell. You don't think, Julie, that he saw me there at the table?"

She was frightened almost into sobriety.

Julie gurgled.

"I'd like to know how he could help it. You were the most conspicuous person in the room."

Zoe was subdued.

As they stood outside the door, a little doubtful as to where they were going, a small man with a big tray paused beside them. He had long hair and somber big eyes.

"It's Tiny Tim," whispered Julie, convulsively. "God bless us, every one!"

"Soul candy?" he questioned them, uncovering a small open pasteboard packet with a few large candies in it. "Made from the inspiration of dreams, symphonies of flavors, made for beautiful people. You"—he spoke to Zoe—"whose soul is purple will need this packet, created for women with purple souls. Yours"—his solemn eyes turned to Julie—"is cardinal red."

"Cardinal red for cardinal sins," scoffed Julie.

She produced a quarter and the poetic candy vendor took his wares into the restaurant below, from whence George's sonorous tenor could be heard in the opening strains of "Mother Machree."

Julie and Zoe, arm in arm, walked up toward Washington Square, its friendly darkness relieved by the falling snow which swirled around the dim street lamps with increasing speed. A party of Villagers, obviously in masquerade costume, passed them in front of the little cigar store. A pretty girl in gypsy dress, barefooted and uncloaked, stopped and smiled at them invitingly.

"Come over to Bobby Edward's Ball—over at Webster Hall," she called over her shoulder.

"Let's go," suggested Zoe. Now she felt sad and very sleepy. Perhaps one of the famous Village masquerades would be fun. Julie shook her head and led her silently into the darkness of the park.

"Sit down," said Julie, as they came to a bench out of the misty circle of lamplight. She sat down limply without brushing the snow off the bench, and Zoe seated herself beside her. They sat, huddled together, silently, with the snow falling about them for several minutes. Presently Julie began to cry softly.

"I'm so happy," she whispered, chokingly, "because—because," she ended in a heartbroken sob, "I'm going to be married."

"Yes," Zoe began to weep, too, "isn't it *wonderful?*"

They sat crying together softly for a long time. When they remembered and started to go home, the busses had stopped running and they had to go over to Sheridan Square and take the subway.

CHAPTER XIII

JULIE had told Alphonse distinctly that she didn't want to see him until exactly three o'clock on the afternoon of the twenty-ninth at the Little Church Around the Corner. But on the twenty-seventh, as Julie was sorting out the silk stockings that were suitable for her trousseau and those that were more suitable for Clematia, Alphonse called up and begged her to dine with him.

"You must come, Julie," he begged. "It is something very, very important. Some things I must tell you before we are truly married. Some things you must know. I have been thinking about them and my conscience—it hurts me."

"Very well," said Julie, wearily.

The business of getting married was not at all adventuresome and Julie was thoroughly bored with it. It is possible that if every one had not been so skeptical of her matrimonial intentions, Julie would have broken the engagement as she usually did. As it was, she did not permit herself to think of such a thing. She was a woman of honor, she told herself repeatedly. And she'd die rather than let those cats say "I told you so" again.

She met Alphonse at the Café Mollatt on

Forty-ninth Street, their customary dining place. It was early and few people were dining yet. They took a table near a solitary young man, who eyed Julie appreciatively as they sat down. Alphonse looked pale and haggard and Julie was mildly interested in what he had to tell that could affect him so strongly.

"I had to have this meeting," Alphonse said in his halting, deliberate English. "We have been engaged—how long? Four weeks. And I have not told you even yet of my past. It is unthinkable."

"I haven't told you of mine, either," Julie said honestly.

Alphonse refused to have his error condoned. He looked sadly at Julie.

"I could not let my wife—my dear, innocent, little wife—find out about my past from some one else, could I? How should I feel if on our honeymoon some one should approach you and say, 'That man once ruined my life'? Ah no, my dear Julie, it is better that you should hear it all from me."

Julie endeavored to look very moral.

"In that case, Alphonse," she said, "it is only right that I should tell you some of the things that belong to my past, as well."

Alphonse permitted himself an indulgent smile.

"What past could a girl of twenty-two have, my dearest? I am a man of the world—twenty-

eight years old—and I am afraid I have had only too much experience, Julie, to make a good husband for you.”

He sighed. But Julie rose nobly to meet the occasion.

“Perhaps you won’t think you are so wicked when I confess some of my—affairs,” and Julie looked reminiscent and not a little proud. Alphonse, however, brushed her aside with a tragic gesture.

“I should begin, perhaps, with Pepita, the belle of the Honduras. I was fourteen at the time. She was so beautiful,” Alphonse’s eyes lit up for an instant but were quickly subdued. “I met her at a ball in Tegucigalpa. Imagine my astonishment when she showed her favoritism for me—a mere boy—so plainly. But the story is too shameful—too shameful.”

“Don’t tell me,” begged Julie, “I understand it all perfectly. Why, I can remember a time from my own experience. I was seventeen, and we were at Atlantic City. A man was there—terribly handsome, and utterly fascinating. I——”

Alphonse again brushed her aside.

“What could you—an innocent, little seventeen-year-old débutante—do that was not quite perfect? After Pepita came Isabella, the most dangerously beautiful woman in all Central America. We walked—that first time—in a little court, lingering by the fountain. She con-

fessed her feeling for me, and I—but what could I do?”

“I understand, Alphonse. I understand perfectly,” Julie assured him, a little impatiently. After all, turn about was fair play. She was anxious to tell a few things, too. “It reminds me of the time in Denver when Johnny Beekman followed me all the way into my hotel room—”

“You do not know about Juanita, though, Julie,” Alphonse went on, sadly. “It breaks my heart to tell you of these shameful spots in my life. It was on the ship coming from Nassau. Juanita chanced to catch sight of me, and threw herself at once at my head. What could I do? Yet, Julie, I want you to see me at my blackest. I want you to know all.”

“Don’t take it so hard, Alphonse,” said Julie, earnestly. “I was recalling a boat experience of my own. Frank Benton was his name—a stunning fellow. We sat there on the deck one night——”

“How can I tell you about Margaret?” Alphonse almost sobbed, covering his face with his hand, “so fair and sweet. She was from one of your own Southern States. Such beautiful lips, Julie. She used to write me such passionate letters. Ah, they stabbed me. What was one to do? The girl was infatuated. She could not believe it would ever pass away. Ah, Julie, you would fling me from you if you knew the true story of Margaret.”

"Oh, no, Alphonse," Julie said, a reminiscent look in her eye. "After all, how can I blame you for Margaret when I remember Howard? It was at Los Angeles, the winter Father took Lucy and me to see——"

"You are too good to me, Julie," Alphonse sighed. "You would never look at me again if I were to tell you of the little English girl—ah, so charming. Lois! Lois and I were at the same hotel at your Palm Beach. Lois—but how can I tell you about Lois? If I were to tell you, Julie, you would send me away from you forever. You would——"

"Nonsense, Alphonse. Of course I would understand," said Julie, her chin on her hands, scarcely paying any attention to Alphonse's words, so absorbed was she in the recollection of her own glorious adventures of the past fourteen or fifteen years. Junior Proms, vacations in the Maine woods, vacations in Honolulu, two years as a co-ed, débuts in three cities, and everywhere men, men, men. Engagements on the stage because of men. All kinds of engagements because of men. Indeed, Julie began to think she had never exchanged more than a dozen words with any of her own sex until she came to Mrs. Horne's. Remembering an endless string of episodes, Julie lapsed into a comatose state while Alphonse went on and on with his own memoirs, which, it appeared, were shameful enough, though hardly regretted.

Julie's eyes in the wall mirror suddenly caught the eye of the young man at the next table. It occurred to her that, in other days, she had tested her love by asking herself if she had or had not noticed the man at the next table, while dining with her at-the-moment fiancé. If she had not noticed him, then it was love. Julie smiled half sadly at her past naïveté. This very man, now, if she were not engaged to marry Alphonse in two days, would interest her immensely. He had a strong, pleasantly ugly face, and she would have liked the way he smiled, for he did smile when he caught Julie's eye. There is something really funny about accidentally catching people's eyes in mirrors. Julie had to admit it.

"——and her mother, too, begged me to stay. But I only kissed the girl madly and ran from the house. Julie, I——"

Julie was remembering the thrill of meeting new men.

It was the only thing that made life worth while for women. If one went on a street car, a subway, a bus, a Pullman, always one's thought was, "Wonder if there'll be a decent man on board?" Every movement thus became full of significance. One speculated, too, on just what type of fiancé one would swing to from the one in hand. Usually Julie swung from Latins to Scotch or British, back to Americans. For instance, in the ordinary course of events,

she would go from Alphonse's beautiful romanticism to the humorous practicality of—say, the man at the next table.

“——but what can one say in a letter? The only way I could have atoned for breaking her heart would be to have married her. Yet why should I break my heart and yours, Julie, for a little governess in Mentone?”

Julie, by a superhuman effort, plucked her mind from the beautiful, bad past to the dreary, conventional future. She was to marry Alphonse. No longer would she thrill with eager joy in living every time she left her house, wondering what and whom it would be today. No longer would she lift her lips for new kisses. Always they would be Alphonse's. And Alphonse did not kiss vibrantly. He kissed in a sort of moist, hot way. One forgot one's pleasure in one's distaste. No, Julie told herself in a sort of aghast wonder, what would there be left to live for? There would be no meaning to anything any more. There would no longer be danger to lure one on. Julie, looking whitely into the mirror, gripped her hands together.

“You are ill—what is it?” Alphonse cried out, in alarm. “What is it, Julie, darling?”

“Nothing. I—I was only thinking—thinking about Kenneth,” Julie answered, “that's all.”

Alphonse drew his heavy, dark brows together.

“Kenneth? That must be some one I do not know. A cousin, perhaps?”

"No. Kenneth——" Julie seemed to see herself in organdy and lace, a flower-trimmed hat on her hair, daintily picking her way through groups of pretty women and bronzed men on a color-spotted, rainbow-parasoled beach. Suddenly a dark shadow blocked her path and impelled her to look up. She saw a sun-browned young giant before her, gleaming and dripping from his swim—and he was staring at her as if—as if—ah, she remembered now how he had put it—"as if he'd died and gone to heaven." Kenneth. She hadn't thought of him for ages. Funny he should come back at that instant.

"Some one I knew a long, long time ago."

Alphonse was wide-eyed.

"Julie—what—what do you mean?"

Julie dismissed the matter with a shrug.

"An old affair, Alphonse, dear. Nothing of importance now."

"Do you mean," Alphonse's voice was low and tense, "that—that there have been other men in your life, Julie?"

"Of course, Alphonse. I tried to tell you——"

The Spaniard half rose in his seat, his long, white face rigid.

"But Julie! You don't know what you are saying! You don't mean you were ever engaged to another man?"

Julie was puzzled. What was the man driving at?

"Of course. As I tried to explain, I——"

"Do you not know what that means? How can my wife—the wife of Alphonse Antonio Padilla—have known other men, perhaps even permitted them to kiss her—ah, Julie!"

Slowly Julie's eyes came to rest on his white face and burning eyes. She twisted the hoop of diamonds on her finger thoughtfully, and held it for a moment in her hand before dropping it on the table. She fumbled for her cloak.

"What—what——"

Alphonse looked at her haggardly, breathing hard.

"Good-by, Alphonse."

"Julie, why did you tell me—why——"

He caught her hand and kissed it passionately, but Julie drew it gently away. His dark head drooped into his outspread hands, the ring unheeded on the table before him. Julie rose and walked toward the door. As she passed the piano she remembered to bow to old Rigo, the long-haired professor, who had finished his violin and piano solos, and was now prepared to give an impassioned rendition of the Prologue from *Pagliacci*. He returned her nod with a deep, flattered salaam. Julie went on out. The young man from the next table was standing in the door of the cloak-room struggling with his overcoat. He looked at Julie and smiled his big, gleaming smile.

Julie smiled back.

CHAPTER XIV

ZOE had been very preoccupied with her work at the office ever since the Christmas Eve celebration which Bill Cornell had witnessed. In fact, so tremendous was her interest in her work, that she barely said good-morning to him any more, but slid into her desk chair and buried her nose in her papers before he could speak. The new girl, Blanche Clay, giggled and whispered with the men over her copy, but Zoe never so much as joined in a single conversation. She had caught herself looking on wistfully three or four times before, but now she did not dare to look up from her work. Bill Cornell might say something scorching about that Christmas Eve.

Not that Zoe regretted the party. Indeed, like any other woman, she looked fondly back on her greatest indiscretion. Only she was not at all sure what she would do if some one should take her to task for it. She was not going to give Bill Cornell a chance to show how little he respected her any more. She was so afraid he might say what he thought about it, that, several times when he started toward her desk, lighting a cigarette—always a sure preliminary to light conversation—Zoe had scrambled up and out to the file room to demand of Maisie some mythical record.

Blanche Clay apparently was quick to notice Cornell's sudden absorption in Zoe, for she flattered Zoe by becoming very catty. Zoe did not understand it at all. One day Allan Myers seated himself on her desk and swung his lanky legs, and Zoe, looking up, was so relieved to see that it was not Cornell that she smiled daz-
zingly. Allan had meant to ask her to do some copy he did not fancy doing, but he was so surprised by her cordiality that he stayed and talked charmingly of everything else in the world but the thing he had intended to. He didn't intend to stay in advertising long, he said, but eventually to isolate himself in his Barrow Street room and write—of course in the modern, futuristic style—Paterian comments on life. He was surprised that Zoe, too, had aspirations toward fame.

Blanche, who had tried in vain to interest Allan, looked on with annoyance and went out to lunch with Peggy, a sign of unusual stress, since she and Peggy were sufficiently of a type to be rivals about the office.

Kane was looking very weary these days and Zoe found herself thinking that, after all, when a man is past thirty he is—well, past thirty. Not that there wasn't a fascination in his maturity. She heard whispered rumors about his matrimonial affairs as well as differences with the head of the firm. He had not lived with his wife for years, but she persisted in trying to

effect a reconciliation he did not wish. He frequently consulted Zoe on little points of approach in their advertising, for Zoe could tell him how the feminine public reacted to certain ads and what touch was needed to make the appeal irresistible.

Kane came in while Allan was talking to Zoe and she detected a certain irritation in his manner. She was embarrassed, since she and Allan were so obviously wasting office time. He gave her one of his charming smiles, however, and spoke to Allan about some new account. He nodded to Mr. Milton and Mr. Crawford, who were exchanging low-voiced confidences concerning certain recalcitrant prospects.

"And I said, why, I said, look at the way these people are wasting your good money. Do you think men like to be told that shaving cream is a 'dainty, exquisitely scented, lavender cream?' Hell, no."

Allan went back to his desk and, in a moment or two, went out to lunch. Zoe looked after him, hungrily. She wished she had been even nicer so that he would have invited her to go, too. But there were only four pennies in her pocket. She would get some from Maisie later in the afternoon, maybe. Meantime she'd pretend to have a great deal of work to do to account for her not going out to lunch.

Being broke was a chronic state with Zoe ever since Christmas. She managed to keep up

with her room rent by paying it in advance whenever she did have any money. The rest of the time she was borrowing from Maisie and sometimes Fania. Julie, when she had her allowance, would empty her purse on the bed and divide it into two equal piles, one for herself and one for Zoe. And Zoe did the same with her salary when Julie was low. This was never reckoned as borrowing. It was just dividing. Once Zoe had thought of her salary as a magnificent one. Now it seemed pitifully inadequate, for she was buying clothes. Julie had told her—and Fania and Margot had agreed—that no woman had any excuse for not being perfectly groomed at all times.

"If you must economize, do without lunch," Julie advised, "but for heaven's sake don't try to do without a manicure every Saturday or a marcel. And you can do without new dresses but don't skimp on the very best underthings and silk stockings and French hankies and hand-make lace collars and ruffles. Those are the things one simply has to have, Zoe. You think it's silly to take those things so seriously, but, my dear, a girl's happiness depends on her looks and her looks depend on such trifles as those!"

Those little touches took large chunks from Zoe's salary every week. It was amazing to see oneself acquire such chic, and to see what a difference it made in one's self-assurance, and even in other people's attitude toward one. It was

such an intoxicating game that, instead of catching up on her extravagances by stinting herself, Zoe had taken to buying whatever appealed to her, being guided not by what she could afford but by how much money she had in her pocket at the moment.

She didn't see Maisie all day and at closing time forgot about it, for Bill Cornell was determinedly helping her on with her cloak and murmuring, "Mind if I walk over to the bus with you? Just walking that way myself."

Zoe, a little breathlessly, said that she didn't mind at all. She felt hot and choky as they went down the elevator together. He took her arm as they left the elevator and Zoe felt an almost irresistible impulse to lean against his broad shoulder. This, she thought, must be love.

"I saw you with Schuler the other night," he announced without preamble as they walked across Madison Park in the dusk.

"Who?" demanded Zoe. "I don't know any Schuler. I never heard of such a person unless you mean that one who has just bought the Peerless Film Company—the one the papers talk about."

"That's the man, all right," Bill said quietly. "The theatrical guy. I saw you with him down at Bertolotti's that night. I didn't know you traveled in his crowd."

Zoe was speechless. Was it Al who was the great Schuler? Or was it George? It might

have been Tom. She was inclined to think it was Al. Truly, liquor was a great leveler. Schuler would certainly not have been so cordial if he had been sober. And she hadn't even known his last name! Julie had confessed to a sense of having seen Al somewhere before, but she thought it had been in the lobby of some hotel and had deduced that he belonged to the genus lizard.

"I didn't know," Zoe said musingly, smiling at the utter absurdity of the coincidence. It was bad enough that she should have been on such hilarious terms with the notorious Schuler without having the man she was most desirous of attracting having seen her.

Cornell saw the smile.

"I must say, candidly, that I was startled," he went on. "You see, you manage to give the impression around the office of being sort of shy and quiet. When I saw you down there I couldn't believe my eyes. I guess you had been drinking a little, too."

Zoe could not help laughing and Cornell thought it sounded callous, evidently, for he went on without looking at her.

"You think it's none of my business, but I've been sort of interested in you ever since you came in there—the office, I mean—and I was—oh, I don't know—sorry to see you in that party. I knew this was your first year in New York and——" It occurred to Zoe that he knew

more than he ever gave any evidence of knowing. She felt a thrill of satisfaction. "Of course, Schuler has a reputation of being a rounder so far as girls and liquor are concerned and——"

Zoe's cue came like an inspiration.

"But he's so fascinating," she demurred. If Cornell thought he was going to save her from the wicked libertine she'd show him that it would take quite a little saving.

Cornell's jaw set rather grimly.

"He may be, and you've a perfect right to tell me to shut up, only I'm like any other decent man. I hate to see a nice girl walk into a spider's trap just because she's here in New York alone and doesn't have a father or some brothers to knock some sense into her head."

Instead of being angry, Zoe was elated at this insulting tone. She said nothing.

"I like to drink and smoke and I think girls have the same right," Cornell went on, keeping his eyes straight ahead, "only—well, I don't know just how to describe it to you, but when I saw you down there that night, drinking, I felt—well, sort of sorry. I knew you were having a good time and all that, but somehow that picture of you down there drinking with that damned Al Schuler has stuck in my mind ever since. I knew it was your own affair. Just because you and I work in the same office was no reason for me to keep tabs on your good times. But—well, there it is. A woman could

tell you why I'm butting into your private affairs like this, but I can't. I felt like it, that's all."

He shrugged his shoulders. Zoe thought, with an inner glow, he was quite right about that statement. A woman could tell why, all right. The idea of being reformed struck her as so utterly ludicrous that she could barely keep from laughing aloud. But since this man's first move in her direction was inspired by the zeal to reform her, she saw no reason why she should not prolong the process in order to keep him interested.

"Of course it's hard to refuse a good time," she said.

They were standing in line for the bus, and there was a very black-eyed stenographer behind them, who seemed to be as interested in their conversation as she was in Cornell's blond good looks.

"Yes, I suppose that's true," said Cornell. "When a girl's pretty and different I suppose she gets so much into the habit of having lively times that it's like a taste for red pepper and mustard. Life seems sort of insipid without them."

Zoe remembered the two or three "lively times" she had had since she came to New York and was ironically amused.

"If you girls would only have strength of character enough to turn down even one invitation a week," said Cornell, a trifle impatiently.

"But I've yet to meet a girl who would do it unless the fellow was a cripple or broke or something."

"How do you know I go out every night?" Zoe demanded after a pause, permitting the black-eyed stenographer to edge in front of her, for reasons more politic than polite.

"Well, you can tell," said Cornell shortly, and Zoe, diplomatically, let that point pass.

"I like quiet times," she protested, "really better than wild ones. Concerts, exhibitions, plays—I'm not always dashing around in restaurants sampling bootleg."

"Do you really?" Cornell asked in surprise. Zoe had always looked like the sort of person who went in for concerts and lectures and she knew it, but apparently the evening at Bertolotti's had stamped her as a wild, reckless species of adventuress.

"If you have any evenings you could spare," Cornell hesitated, "perhaps you would come to the theater with me. I don't care for concerts, but I do like good plays and musical comedies. Of course it may seem tame entertainment to you after Al Schuler's parties, but I believe it would be a lot better for you."

Zoe tried to look doubtful.

"I think I could save an evening for you once in a while," she said.

"How about Friday?" Cornell demanded, with flattering promptness.

Zoe forcibly repressed the impulse to say, "Any evening," and answered that she'd have to look it up when she got home. She'd let him know in the morning, she said, and Cornell seemed pleased enough. It hadn't occurred to her that Cornell might be flattering himself on having made a difficult conquest, just as she was doing. It flashed across her mind that his idea of a quiet evening was to her the height of dissipation. But she had no intention of permitting her reformer to guess that much. If he fancied himself in the rôle of proselytist, why she would be the reluctant convert. It was the only logical adjustment.

A Number 5 bus was now in and the line before her was rapidly diminishing. Cornell had to stop in a shop before going up to his club, but he waited to see her on the bus. She was half-way up the stairs of the bus when a ghastly thought struck her. She saw Cornell's retreating figure and waved frantically.

"Oh, Bill! Bill! Oh—Bill!"

Cornell wheeled around sharply and came back. He looked up at her.

"What's the matter?"

"Will you—will you loan me six cents?" Zoe, in the haste of the moment, with a fat Jewish gentleman glaring behind her, did not stop to make explanations.

Cornell grinned. He reached in his pocket. Zoe thanked him, hurriedly, and was in her seat

before she remembered that she had called him Bill instead of Mr. Cornell, as she should have done. Oddly enough, Cornell, hurrying up Fifth Avenue, was thinking about that same thing. And, for some reason, he was whistling.

CHAPTER XV

THE personnel of Mrs. Horne's was gradually changing as spring approached. Amy Bruce had discreetly vanished with announcements of a new play in which she was to be starred, through what means no one was in doubt. She cordially invited every one to call on her after she got established in her new place, and promised to send every one complimentary tickets to the opening night of her performance. As she neglected to leave her address, none of the girls followed up her invitation to call.

Olive Tanhill, futile, wavering Olive, was starting a tea room in the theatrical district and no one, thinking of the ten years Olive had spent dabbling in dramatic prospects, told her she ought not to sacrifice her career to commerce. It was vaguely rumored that at last Olive's father had made his protest. Either she came back to Fort Wayne or she started making some use of her expensive education in New York. At any rate, the long-tried, elderly Tanhill had no intention of providing a liberal allowance merely for his daughter to waste in waiting for mythical opportunities. And Olive, frightened at last, was ready to jump into the first thing that came along. Since this turned out to be a chance at a third ownership in an artistic tea

shop with two retired actresses, she went into it without demur and, strangely enough, proceeded to get quite absorbed in the thing. Zoe and Maisie, lunching there one Saturday, were astonished to see her sitting very contentedly at the cashier's desk. Of course the quiet man of forty or so, who was always seen lunching there and seemed to be an old friend of Olive's may have had something to do with her serene acceptance of an industrial rather than artistic career. But no one was ever sure of this until some time later.

Enna, too, had moved over to a popular Art Club with her stunning wardrobe, her rented piano and her scales. The cause of her moving was known to every one and provided much delight to her unsympathetic companions.

It appeared that Enna was returning home one evening from a concert at Carnegie Hall, and had decided to walk, although it was rather late for a young woman of her severe standards to be promenading alone. Enna walked along unmolested for several blocks, looking possible mashers sternly in the eye in a way to dishearten the most aggressive of them. She was well past Sixty-sixth Street when she discovered that one man was following her. Inexpressibly annoyed, she kept to her path without turning for some time, though she was quite sure he was still behind her. Once she turned and stared angrily, hoping to discourage him, but the man

merely returned her stare and looked as if he were about to speak to her.

Enna began to hurry and, to add to her discomfiture, she realized that there was a small but insidious hole in the heel of her stocking, and any one behind could not fail to notice it. She was bursting with rage. She turned up Seventy-second Street and cut down West End in a futile effort to get rid of her pursuer, but each time she turned around the man gave her a bland smile and increased her anger.

Enna reached Eighty-third and tore up the street to the house. The little colored hallboy, who also ran the elevator, was so slow in getting to the door to unlock it that the pursuer had a chance to catch up with Enna. As she rushed in the door, he calmly walked in, too. For an instant Enna's head spun and then she turned in a white fury:

"How dare you follow me all over town, you—you—masher! Can't a decent girl go outside her door at night without some miserable tramp like you taking advantage of her to insult her? Now, you turn around and march, or I'll call the janitor!"

She whirled into the elevator, leaving the man staring up at her in the most ludicrous astonishment. The elevator boy looked at her curiously.

"Didn't you know, Miss," he said, "*dat dat man is de janitor?*"

Naturally, Enna could not live in the place

and meet the janitor fixing the electric lights, tinkering with the plumbing, fixing the leaks and so on every day. She packed up her things and fled, and in her place a fat little teacher of æsthetic dancing came to Mrs. Horne's, and told endless anecdotes of her forty years as a teacher, and what Mr. Chalif said to her, and what Mr. Koslov said to her, and how complimentary Mr. Fokine had been over her work.

"As bad as Enna," Julie grumbled to Zoe. "In fact, I'd rather have Enna. We all go around looking like frumps since Enna took her clothes away. If this fat terpsichore had some decent clothes it might not be so bad."

"Can't you just picture her flitting around in a couple of veils?" giggled Maisie, sitting on the floor and hugging her knees.

Julie remained disconsolate. For one thing, Julie's father, like Olive's, had taken it into his head to question the wisdom of keeping up two households, one in St. Louis and one in New York. He had written, recommending that Julie plan to return home in the spring for good.

"Everybody goes back after a while," Maisie said, confidently, "and the reason they hate it so is because they're dashing artists in New York, and New York men like their women sophisticated and well past the teens. Not for marrying, of course, but to step out with. But back home everybody thinks they're just old maids, and—well—maybe they are."

Zoe saw some logic in this, for it occurred to her that even she was considered practically shelved back in Albion. That—at twenty-three! But at least she didn't have to go back there, as the girls did who were dependent on their families. Even if she did have to work hard and have less clothes than Julie and the rest of these semi-artists, she was at least independent.

"I'm sick of Mrs. Horne's anyway," went on Julie, buffing her nails, "I'm going to go and take an apartment in the Village as soon as I can land a New York engagement. Going down and see Brown's first thing this morning and tell 'em I'll take anything. Chorus, even."

Zoe's face fell. She had become so accustomed to adoring, obeying and marveling at Julie that she couldn't bear to think of having her leave. As for leaving Mrs. Horne's herself—why, Zoe had never been so utterly happy any place in her life.

"Maybe some new girls will come here," she suggested, hopefully.

"New girls! Bah!" Julie sniffed, "I get tired of meeting new girls. They're just the same types all over again. Anyway they aren't human enough to be interesting. You're the only human person in the whole lot. You and Maisie. And Maisie, here, is so blamed independent, even if she does have a little interest in other people. Can't imagine Maisie weeping any if I left, can you? Maisie would say, 'By,

Julie. Good luck, old bean,' and go cheerily on her way. Of course the rest wouldn't even wish me good luck."

"You're blue today," commented Zoe.

Julie flung the buffer back on the dresser and looked at Zoe discouragedly.

"You know nobody cares what becomes of you, here," she said. "It's like the ocean. While you're floating, it's all right, but once you start down the water closes right over your head. There isn't any hole left at all. I'm tired of New York and everything."

"You might try Paris," suggested Zoe, practically. "Perhaps a romantic city instead of a commercial city would appeal to you more."

A faint spark came to Julie's blue eyes.

"What could I do?" she said. "Dad wouldn't give me the money. Of course I might get a model job—I've done it with some New York branches of Paris firms. I might—but what's the use? Might just as well go back home to Dad and Lucy."

"You should have married Alphonse," Maisie said.

"And had some children," Zoe suggested, mischievously.

"Don't want Alphonse's babies," Julie said, distastefully. "I don't fancy motherhood as a career for me, anyway. I think it's greatly over-advertised."

"Maybe it is," agreed Zoe, thoughtfully. "So

far as really getting the most from life, the old maids nowadays seem to have it all over the mothers. And then standards are so much broader that girls really don't have to get married out of curiosity. Take Aunt Jude, for instance. Fifty or sixty, and trotting all over the world as happy as she can be. Adventures in Japan or Patagonia or Montmartre or Nice—and all sorts of love affairs. Stunning looking, too."

"Of course, though, she doesn't have any one to look after her in her old age," Maisie said, ingenuously.

"As if the mothers did!" Zoe retorted. "Sent to institutions—even the poorhouse—by their dear children, or done out of their property by loving sons. Or, at best, all the children feel is a sort of sentimental pity. 'Poor old Ma,' they say, and then fight over whose place it is to feed her. Daughter can't have her on account of mother interfering with her bridge parties and always looking such a frump. Son can't keep her on account of his wife. And certainly nobody could spare her money to live on, on account of the high cost of their gasoline. Poor old mothers! I'm not going to be one. I feel sorry for them. I'm going to be like Aunt Jude."

"You've come to the right place," said Julie, feelingly. "This town is just full of Aunt Judes. I'm getting to be one myself. Only—see here, Zoe, maybe these joyful old maids feel un-

happier down in their hearts than the mothers do. Mothers don't realize what a raw deal they're getting, so it doesn't bother them. Maybe they sit in the poorhouse and think what a fine thing it is that Johnny's got a new automobile. And trotting around and having adventures—well, Zoe—it must get so damned monotonous!”

Zoe was troubled. It was so hard to see the truth about these things. It was true that the incipient Aunt Judes at Mrs. Horne's were a discontented enough crew, even though superficially they were enjoying life to the full. And the mothers—well, the mothers at least had a philosophy.

“Sure you don't fancy yourself leading a couple of towheaded little Cornells around Central Park?” Julie teased. Cornell had begun to loom importantly in Zoe's affairs.

“No,” said Zoe, shortly, and Julie changed the subject.

“Wonder how much it costs to live in Paris,” she said.

CHAPTER XVI

ZOE had been to the theater twice with Bill Cornell and to the Capitol four or five times. On these occasions she had rushed home from the office, unable to eat any dinner, sitting in a clammy agony of anticipation until it was time to get dressed. When it approached eight o'clock, the usual trysting time, she sat before her mirror fairly nauseated with excitement. And then when the bell rang announcing his presence in the lower reception hall—!

They would take the bus and when his hand touched hers Zoe always turned speechless from the sheer thrill of it. Yet, oddly enough, she was rather ashamed of the thrill his physical nearness always gave her; as women are when they find themselves responding physically to men they recognize as intellectually or socially their inferiors. Zoe did not admit that Bill Cornell's mind was not as good as hers, yet her reactions indicated that something within her, something subconscious, recognized an inequality. He had a straight-thinking brain, with an adequate appreciation of books and plays, but Zoe felt a subtle lack. Perhaps it was understanding.

She tried to act very cool toward him during office hours and, to disguise her partiality,

talked and laughed much more with Allan Myers, who had begun to be lazily interested in her and occasionally took her out to lunch. She had even tried to pique Bill by telling him how much she liked Allan. Bill's complacent reaction made her inwardly hot. She hated him for his egotistical lack of jealousy. He didn't care whether she liked him or not! She wished she could preserve the fine indifference she had felt when she talked with Kane that day. It gave her such a sense of power. But she was lost, now, in her infatuation.

If Bill did not appear to respond to her maneuverings, Allan unexpectedly did. Zoe was startled to find him staring at her constantly, his usually bored, dark eyes alight with a faint gleam. He asked her occasionally if she was doing any play-writing. She had scarcely ever thought of him as a person; he was simply a foil for Bill Cornell. He was good looking enough, except that his mouth had a sardonic twist and his clothes had a slouchy, Village air. She never remembered what she talked about with him, for her head was always turned, mentally, to see how Cornell was taking her coquetry.

One day Allan amazed her by proposing to take her to call on some friends in the Village. It was quite a step from their casual lunches, but Zoe accepted at once, chiefly because she knew Cornell had overheard the invitation.

"He hasn't asked to see me for ten days," she

told herself, hot with the stab at her vanity, "and I know he took Blanche Clay out to lunch last Saturday. I'm going to be just as indifferent as he is!"

"Don't dress, for heaven's sake," Allan warned her. "Lucille's always having people in and they always go just as is. A Piccadilly collar would spoil the whole evening."

"I had no intention of wearing one," Zoe assured him, hastily.

"Well, the feminine equivalent of one," Allan grinned. "Supposing we dine at Mori's and then run over to the studio afterward."

Zoe was getting interested in the party for its own sake, instead of as a means to an end. She had never been to a real studio party in Greenwich Village.

"I think you'll like Lucille," Allan went on, lighting a cigarette. "She's an artist, at the moment engaged in designing for the cloak and suit trade. She and Dave have been living together for years—in the modern way, you understand—and she's done wonders for him. Simply devoted herself to the business of making him amount to something. If Dave had his way he'd be puttering around in his old basement, making furniture for about fifteen dollars a week, thinking he was a great success. Lucille had a frightful time with him."

"They sound nice," Zoe murmured politely. She was not sure how one acted among people

who disregarded the marriage convention. They must be terribly in love to throw the comfort of tradition to the winds. Zoe thought it might be thrilling to see a man and woman so tremendously in love with each other—like Paola and Francesca, or Romeo and Juliet.

At night as she was in the file room making preparations to leave the office, she saw Cornell lingering at her desk. She hastily put on a little lip rouge and sauntered back into the room.

"Oh, hello," she said, with a great show of unconcern, "anything you wanted?"

Cornell ran an embarrassed hand through his blond hair.

"Why—er—I was wondering if you'd help me out tomorrow on that Blue Oven booklet."

Zoe rejoiced at the obviousness of his purpose.

"Of course," she answered. She began to lock the drawers of her desk, ignoring him. It was ridiculous what childish games people in love played. Of course he liked her and, of course, she was mad about him, yet here they were making this silly pretense of indifference!

Cornell coughed.

"Anything on for tonight?"

Zoe's heart jumped, but she did not lift her eyes from the lock she was struggling with.

"Studio party down in the Village," she said, offhand. His face darkened and she sensed at once that he was thinking of the Bertolotti episode.

"Wild crowd down there," he said, hesitantly. It was a triumph to make such a self-satisfied man as Cornell appear ill at ease. Zoe gloated.

"Oh, not very," she said, with the air of having been in much wilder crowds. How hard good women work to make men they love think them bad enough to be interesting!

"When can I see you?" asked Cornell directly, his face a little red. Zoe yearned for him.

"Next week sometime," she said bravely and a little breathlessly. She put out her hand, impulsively. Somehow she wanted to touch him. His own hand closed over hers so swiftly that she gasped. Cornell felt the shock of that contact, too. It was queer what a magnetic current ran between these two. It was so powerful that Zoe felt almost guilty on seeing Allan waiting at the door for her. She spoke to him with hysterical gayety to cover her confusion.

"We only shook hands," she reminded herself, perplexedly, "yet I feel as ashamed as if Allan had caught us in each other's arms!"

The studio was on Bank Street, and Lucille was not the glamorous Francesca of Zoe's imaginings, but a short, snappy-eyed, dark person who was most unromantically efficient. She was poking the fire as Zoe and Allan entered the big, barren basement room, and she called over her shoulder for them to sit down.

"Dave went over to Dariel's" she announced. "The man would perish if Dave didn't take over a can of sardines now and then. You know Dariel, Allan, don't you?"

She took in Zoe casually.

"Who doesn't know Dariel?" Allan replied, dropping on to the sofa. "Funny duck, but he is the real thing, all right."

"You're a writer, Allan says," Lucille said to Zoe, without interest.

"Yes. Only I've really done nothing since I came to the city. I expect to get busy very soon, though. A play, I think." Zoe felt that her presence in Village circles must be justified. She determined that she must do some writing soon, if only to prove to people that she could.

Lucille looked frankly bored. She lit two tall red candles on the mantelpiece, adjusted a batik scarf on the yellow-painted table, and sat down with a smothered yawn on a yellow chair. Zoe was puzzled by her. She did not look like the sort of person who would abandon all for love, but rather like one who had a very definite purpose from which even love could not swerve her.

When Dave came in a few minutes later, Zoe was even more disillusioned. A magnificent, if base, passion between two glorious, heroic figures thrilled her profoundly. But the affair between the self-centered, ordinary little designer and the timid, commonplace David

offended her morals. It seemed petty and soiled.

"Just like that Paine woman in Albon who lived with the actor," Zoe thought. "Not a grand love affair at all, but a sort of cheap arrangement to save room rent."

With David came two or three others: a pasty-faced, pasty-haired girl in a paste-colored tweed suit and a white cravat, her hair shingled close to her bumpy head; a gaunt young man with a bald head and a close, reddish beard which occasionally parted horizontally and revealed bad teeth; a sallow, oily-haired youth who spoke Iowa idioms with a strong Harvard accent. These, Allan whispered, were the leaders of Greenwich Village thought. Zoe felt a warm surge of excitement. Here she was face to face with the Young Intellectuals of whom every one talked nowadays. She found herself wishing that she had read more of the modern things since she had come to New York. She'd kept up avidly with everything when she'd been so far away from the city. She really should be one of this group, and yet in another way she belonged at Mrs. Horne's. She wished she could scintillate and show that she, too, was really very clever.

Disappointedly enough, there was no need for her to scintillate. The bearded young man talked about his room rent, the oily-haired youth told how to cook slightly spoiled meat so

that it didn't taste, the pasty-faced girl boasted of how many words she wrote a day.

"Yes, but Aldah—what words!" David mildly retorted.

Zoe felt herself an onlooker and was so interested in this new phase of New York life that she said very little. She was waiting for the brilliant utterances that such clever people were bound to make. Allan watched her curiously. She sat on the edge of the couch on which he lounged, a little apart from the group about the fireplace, and partly ignored by them. Lucille, in the center of the group, talked constantly and with a devotion to the subject of David that seemed, at first, charming.

"He's finding himself, boys," she was saying, her arm flung affectionately over Dave's shoulder. "If we could only find something now that he was really suited for! He's not going to be a basement carpenter all his life, people! He was destined for big things."

"Lucille's simply making Dave," Allan whispered to Zoe. "He probably would have spent all his life as a carpenter if Lucille hadn't just taken hold of him."

"He doesn't look as if he wanted to be made," Zoe remarked, a little maliciously.

Allan, after a shocked pause, choked back a laugh.

"That never struck me, but as a matter of fact you've hit it. He was having a glorious

time tinkering with his old boards, hoping for nothing better than to be a good carpenter. He never even knew it was menial work until Lucille explained it to him. He thought he was a big success, I suppose, because he was getting a few dollars for doing something he liked! But Lucille came along and told him he was a failure and she's going to make an interior decorator out of him. She makes more with her designing than he does so, of course, she has the right of way."

"It's just like marriage, isn't it?" Zoe reflected. "Sort of prosaic and stupid with the wife trying to make the husband stop doing the thing—whatever it is—that he likes best."

"Oh, if you're out looking for romance," Allan said languidly, his dark eyes appraising her, "you should avoid any arrangement of this sort. It's always commercial or sordid. One or the other is getting some material benefit from it, you can be sure. It has all the disadvantages of marriage and practically none of the advantages. However, it's quite customary down here."

"Well——" Zoe forgot what she intended to say, for she looked up and encountered the haggard, dark-bearded face of the man they called Dariel. He had come silently into the room without knocking and, after an aloof survey of the group about the fireplace, came straight to Zoe. He stood before her somberly

until Allan, with a trace of irritation, introduced him.

"You are a writer, I know," he said, sitting down beside her. "What do you write?"

Zoe was confused. It seemed silly to call herself a writer on the strength of a few things that had never been published anyway. She felt somehow humble before this wan, threadbare Dariel.

"Things," she said, vaguely, conscious of Allan's amusement. "I've been in an office several months."

"Then you write at night," said Dariel, interrogatively. He seemed unaware of the existence of the others. Occasionally Lucille flung a remark to him, but he paid absolutely no heed. He saw only Zoe, and Zoe leaned half-hypnotized toward the young vagabond writer.

"No—I—I haven't written much. I want to write later on, though. I want to be a great playwright."

"The way to be a great playwright is to write plays," Dariel said solemnly.

"There's your secret, Zoe," Allan remarked, dryly.

"You should not waste your time in an office. You should write all day."

"I daren't risk it," Zoe said, frightened at the very idea. "Give up my job, you mean? But I have to eat and have clothes. I wouldn't dare—oh, I wouldn't dare let all my security go on a

chance of succeeding as a writer. It's such a chance."

"You wouldn't sacrifice security for immortality?" Dariel stared at her. Zoe shrank away from his rebuking eyes.

"I'm going to be a great novelist and so I write novels from dawn to midnight," went on Dariel in his hollow, dreary voice. "I have written seven."

"How long did it take?" asked Zoe, timidly.

"Eight years," answered Dariel, simply. "I have worked very hard. One sees no one except at the Kitchen occasionally or when one meets some one at the grocer's getting crackers and cheese."

"Dariel lives on that fare—that and cold cereal," Allan announced, stretched out behind them. "He has food reduced to its proper place. You should have him explain, Zoe. Shredded wheat and water is his great dish. He found he was looking forward from one meal to another when he used cream and sugar on it, and his appetite interfered with his work. So he eliminated the cream and sugar and now he eats only from necessity and not from desire. Try it out, Zoe. Perhaps you could write a few plays, then."

"How can you work when you don't eat properly?" Zoe asked.

"It isn't work," Dariel frowned. "It's—it's all I can do. If I feel merry I write a gay chapter

for a spree; if I feel unhappy I console myself by writing a sad word symphony."

"He never wastes a minute, Zoe," Allan broke in, idly. "The man has a destiny to live up to."

"I have a destiny," Dariel repeated with dignity.

Zoe was awestruck by his colossal sincerity. His somber, dreamy face made her catch her breath with unwilling reverence. Lucille and the others might be posers but this man was real. Zoe felt that he was a sort of priest of art. She was ashamed of having represented herself as a writer. She, too, had dreamed of having a destiny, but she had seen herself in a brocaded evening cloak coming out between acts to accept the stormy applause at the première of her first play. She had not seen herself living on crackers for eight years in a dirty Village garret. Perhaps that's what one ought to do—work and sacrifice for work if one wanted to become a great artist. Zoe shuddered, appalled at the picture of a gas-lit, cold room, herself in worn clothes—cotton stockings, too!—working, working at her desk from daybreak to night every day for years—years—years. The whole world shut out—all life and warmth and kisses shut out, and only herself, Zoe Bourne, shabby, old, in a dreary little room alone with Fame!

"Oh!" she gasped.

"You are not an artist. You are only a bright flower," Dariel told her, gravely, "swaying and

scarlet in a wind. If life were not so short and time so precious I should fall in love with you."

He got up abruptly and walked out of the room. Zoe, released from the awful spell of his presence, turned, with a little sigh, to Allan.

"Scared you, didn't he?" Allan asked, softly. Zoe nodded, mutely, her eyes filled with quick tears. Lucille was holding forth in the center of the room and the pasty-faced girl was lighting the samovar. Zoe saw them blindly.

"You ought to live down here, you know," Allan said in a low voice. He pulled her head down toward his. She felt his lips brushing against her smooth, brown cheek and, for some unaccountable impulse, turned her head swiftly and met his lips.

"Adorable," he whispered. He sat up and slid an arm around her shoulders. Zoe was dazedly conscious of it but she did not stir. This—this was Life. She didn't want to be in a lonely little attic, recording Life. She wanted to be a *part* of Life!

CHAPTER XVII

SATURDAY noons Zoe always went to lunch with Maisie. They usually went to Olive's tea room or to the Yates' restaurant, and thence to a *matinée*. But one Saturday Maisie pointed reproachfully to Mr. Bergman's office and dolefully whispered that he had commanded her to stay that Saturday until two and help him go through some old records.

"'Course I'll get extra pay," she said, "but it just spoils the whole afternoon. Can't go to a lunch or *matinée* or anything, because you know how he is. If he says two he means three o'clock. Darn!"

It was agreed that their holiday together would have to be foregone and Zoe went out alone. For the second time in history, Kane and Cornell went down the elevator with her. Somewhat to her chagrin—for she did want to talk to Bill—Kane engaged her in conversation about some pamphlet she had just completed, and when the elevator reached the ground floor he asked:

"Going up on the bus? So am I," and nodded to Cornell absently. Bill said good-by curtly and started off toward Fourth Avenue. Zoe walked with Kane toward the bus. After all she was growing very fond of Kane, even if he had not the vigorous, healthy charm of Bill Cor-

nell. For one thing she liked his keen, amused eyes and the delightful way he had of making her talk about herself, making her feel that everything she said and did was oh—tremendously clever.

She wondered idly if Mrs. Kane was pretty. Where was the woman, anyway? She was thinking in a disjointed way about Mrs. Kane and Maisie and Bill Cornell—was he going to lunch with some girl when he hurried away like that—even while she made fairly intelligent responses to Kane. They climbed on top of the bus and Zoe rushed for the front seat.

"My favorite seat," she exclaimed, half apologetically. "Do you ever sit in front and sort of squint your eyes so that all you can see of the other busses as they pass is the top deck? You see it rolling along, not in relation to the people on the sidewalk or inside the bus at all, but in relation to the sky. It's like being on a ship."

"I never played that game," Kane said, and added, quizzically, "Are you in the habit of ignoring the foundations of things and seeing them only in relation to the sky?"

"I'm not sure," Zoe answered, not at all certain what he meant. "Anyway it just depends on your point of view which is really their foundation, the earth or the sky."

She decided, suddenly, to ask him the thing that had troubled her ever since the night at Lucille's. He was a writer. He would know.

"Do you think," she began, "that a person who wants to be a writer ought to do anything but write, even if she starves?"

Kane considered.

"Debatable point," he said. "Starvation, in the case of many poets I know, is just a pretty way of saying one lives on one's friends. If your art doesn't suffer by your loss of self-respect, then by all means give up your regular job and write. Nobody ever really starves at it, anyway. Somebody always takes pity on you."

Zoe said nothing further, but she felt comforted.

"Have you seen the Jonas Lie exhibition?" Kane asked, presently. "I thought I'd go up now and look around. Lie's a favorite of mine."

Who was Jonas Lie, Zoe wondered. An artist, of course. Oh, why was she so stupid about things she yearned to know? She *would* know! She would! Mr. Kane would teach her.

"I'm afraid I know very little about pictures," she said to him, wistfully.

Kane's face fell.

"Why, Miss Bourne, I'm—do you know I'm disappointed? Don't you," his eyes twinkled, "don't you even make the gesture?"

"I don't even know enough to make the gesture," said Zoe, humbly.

"Well, that is easily remedied," Kane answered. "Three, four, perhaps five exhibi-

tions, and you'll know how. Then you will learn to stand two yards back from the picture—then walk up swiftly to it and make a great show of studying the detail. Then, 'Ah, palette knife!' you will say, and step on to the next."

Zoe smiled.

"I want to know so many things and I fumble around, not knowing where to begin," she said, slowly.

"Good. We'll begin with Jonas Lie," Kane said, and added, wryly, "Trust a man to begin by teaching you what he loves best."

"I think I would like it best, too," Zoe said, shyly. Kane's face lit up marvelously. They exchanged a look of warm, eager understanding.

"Here we are." Kane pushed the bell and they alighted from the bus before an art gallery in the lower Fifties. They entered a quiet, velvet-draped room, hung with wintry blue marine paintings. Zoe studied them intently. Then she gave an involuntary shudder.

"His ice-bound rivers are too real to be comfortable," she said, and then looked at one with a growing pleasure in its crisp color and bold lines.

"You're getting on," Kane smiled at her. He seemed to glow and grow young in the atmosphere of the gallery as some men do in the atmosphere of their smoke-fogged clubs. "It's that chilly blue that gets you. There is another man, a Frenchman, who, when he's in the mood,

can paint winter winds as sharp as Lie's. Charreton is his name. You must see some of his things."

"I'd love to," Zoe breathed. She followed him from picture to picture, comparing their responses to certain effects. Then they sat on the cushioned divan in the middle of the room and talked until Kane glanced at his watch and jumped up contritely.

"You poor child! Three o'clock and you haven't had a bit of lunch."

"I had forgotten about eating," Zoe interrupted, truthfully.

Kane led her out of the gallery, berating himself for his carelessness.

"Shall we go into one of these creamed-chicken-and-toast places around here?" he asked.

"I'm quite hungry," Zoe equivocated.

Kane chuckled.

"Which means the lady wants a steak and not any tea-room fare. I know just the place for hungry people."

He took her to a German restaurant on Forty-fourth Street, where an order of steak meant at least a fourth of an ox, so it seemed to Zoe, regarding her plate with alarm. There were little German mottoes about the walls, and illustrations of Grimm's fairy tales painted on the ceiling and walls.

"You can always tell which are the real eating

places," Zoe observed, glancing around her, "because they're full of men—usually older men."

"A man seldom appreciates the ah—gastro-nomic nuances until he's past thirty," admitted Kane.

Zoe was completely happy that afternoon with Kane. She had a strange, glowing feeling about him—nothing thrilling or ecstatic, but rich and deep. She was grateful—as a girl is to her first lover even after she has outgrown the romance and sees him as a rather crude figure—grateful because he had broadened her capacity for happiness. Kane had opened up to Zoe a new and beautiful world, a world she had looked upon as something quite outside her reach or desire.

"You must know etchings, too," Kane told her, eagerly. "They are easy to love. Benson and Troy Kinney to begin with, because they're easiest to get acquainted with. Whistler, because he is the king of them all, and after that the rest: Pennell, Zorn, and Hassam, and Bone and this new bird man, Roland Clark. We must go to that exhibition at the Anderson Galleries. They will have all the good people. And then——"

An idea seemed to strike him, for he looked at Zoe speculatively.

"There's another place I want to take you. I found some beautiful old prints down at a second-hand book shop on Union Square. The

man who owns the place is a hundred years old, they say, but, unfortunately for us poor people, he still knows perfectly well when he has a treasure."

"You want to buy them?" inquired Zoe.

"Lord, no! Part of the joy is in not being able to own them. There is the glamour of the unattainable about them."

"And one can always visit them," Zoe nodded comprehendingly.

"It's queer," Kane pondered. "The few things I own, even though I love them dearly, do not give me nearly the delight that the things I can't own do. I'm rather glad I haven't money enough to buy certain things."

"Owning them cheapens them," put in Zoe, "like owning the Venus de Milo or a-a-a—princess."

"A princess is a different matter entirely, my dear." Kane's eyes twinkled back at her.

"Look. It's getting dark," she exclaimed, disappointedly, as they emerged from the restaurant into the twilight.

Kane sighed.

"You have to meet some one, then."

Zoe shook her head.

"No. I want to go down to that book shop."

Kane was overjoyed. He hurried her to a Washington Square bus and they rode down, Kane anxious lest the shop should close before they could reach it. However, they found that

there was an hour left till closing time, when they came to the little nest of book shops around Union Square.

The owner of Kane's particular shop remembered him, although he looked at them blackly as they entered and continued to sit by his stove smoking a vile-smelling pipe, and eying his would-be customers with such ferocity that Zoe wondered they weren't frightened away. Each book she picked up from the chaotic, dusty stacks around her brought a resentful glare from the proprietor.

"He thinks nobody appreciates their value like he does," Kane whispered. "He's thinking—'*Canaille!*'"

From above, a dim light shone over the tiny, dust-shadowed room, leaving a dozen little book-partitioned nooks in utter darkness, hiding who knew what mysterious literary treasures? On one table were a group of yellow-paged, ancient books of mission lands, histories of towns nobody ever heard of, and poetry by Victorian parsons—all marked "10c." On another table were the twenty-five-cent books. These were war fiction and essays by overnight authors, novels by Myrtle Reid, travel stories of fifty years ago, and here Zoe found three Anthony Trollope books she wanted to keep. Kane had asked to see the prints and the old man, his iron-gray beard bristling with indignation, had finally produced a worn old book, binding forty or fifty

reproductions of etchings by Bauer, Meryon, Toulouse-Lautres, Rembrandt, Brangwyn, Le Gros, and Daumier. There were two originals which the artist had discarded and crossed the drawing with three or four lines.

Zoe pored over them thirstily. This—this was Life. This was Beauty. Here in this little musty room with Kane and the old bookseller. She would never have found out if Kane had not guided her. How one fumbled about to find something that was right before one's eyes! It was Julie and the rest who had tried to put her off the track.

"Seventy dollars for that book," the old man's voice broke in grimly.

"I'll give you forty," said Kane, but the old man grunted angrily and went back to his seat by the fire. He took the book with him and put it back on the shelf with an ominous, threatening air, as if he expected them to try to steal it.

"Of course he would be killed with disappointment if some one actually did offer him seventy," Kane murmured to Zoe. "He wouldn't sell it for a million, but he pretends to put a price on it for the hateful pleasure of seeing poor people desire it. He's an old demon. I'm very fond of him, nevertheless."

"I liked the Brangwyns best," Zoe said. "Should I have liked the Rembrandts best?"

"No," said Kane, "no one should like best the thing he ought to like best."

Zoe's eye ran down a stack of old books in the corner. Here was "Tristram Shandy," "Harry Lorrequer," which Kane assured her was screamingly funny, a "Story of Mary Maclane," an interesting looking "Trimalchio's Dinner," which Kane said was an entertaining translation of Petronius.

"I don't suppose there's a single book that doesn't eventually land here with a 5c tag to it," mourned Zoe.

"Still, the person who finally does get it for his five cents," consoled Kane, "probably loves it more than the person who originally bought it."

Zoe was fingering a 1735 edition of La Bruyère and caught a sentence, "There's something more than wit required to make an author."

"What more than wit is required to make an author?" she demanded.

Kane shrugged humorously.

"Some say a seat at the Algonquin. Others a friend in the publishing business. However, it is generally admitted that an ability to write more or less English does enter into the thing to a small extent."

The sentence stuck in her mind, troublesomely, even when Kane pointed out another comment, "We must laugh before we are happy, or else we may die before we ever laugh at all."

"That's such wisdom that I must get it for you," declared Kane, and insisted on purchasing the book at once and presenting her with it.

It was heavenly to win back her old enjoyment of books, something Zoe had found so hard to keep in the mad whirl of New York. She clung to the feeling now as something precious returned to her. She was grateful to Kane. He had saved her—she didn't know what from, but he had saved her.

After a while the old man called to them that he was shutting up shop. Kane drew a deep breath when they got outside and smiled down at Zoe. She knew it was a smile of complete approval and she glowed back at him. She felt that she had found a true friend.

They crossed through the park, where already the shuffling, stooped, silent figures who seem to dwell in Union Square, had begun to fill the benches. Zoe met the sodden gaze of a man, slumped on a bench, and she involuntarily took Kane's arm. These failures frightened her.

"Let's hurry," she said, nervously, "I want to get home."

They reached Fifth Avenue and Zoe got on the bus alone, for Kane was staying down town.

"I've liked it so much," she said, warmly, as they parted.

"It's been a beautiful day," Kane said, a little wistfully, "beautiful."

CHAPTER XVIII

ON the Monday following her expedition with Kane, Zoe received a summons to appear in Mr. Bergman's office. Somewhat mystified, she adjusted her organdie collar, powdered her nose and went timidly into the great man's sanctuary. Smug and dapper in his new pepper-and-salt suit, Mr. Bergman frowned prodigiously at Zoe's tremulous greeting.

"Just a word of warning, Miss Bourne—merely a word of warning."

Warning? Zoe sat down fearfully, her eyes wide. Mr. Bergman saw, not without a pleasant sensation of power, that the girl was afraid of him.

"Nothing very serious," he pursued, "yet important enough for me to bring it to your attention. It concerns a little matter of propriety. The truth is this, Miss Bourne: on Saturday last, an important client of ours and myself had the embarrassing opportunity of seeing you on a side street arm in arm with Christopher Kane."

"Yes?" asked Zoe, wonderingly.

"Mr. Kane," said Mr. Bergman, impressively, "is a married man, as the client happened to know. The incident, from a business point of view, looked bad. It placed me in the position

of a man fostering unethical relations between his employees. It made the firm appear cheap in the eyes of the client, who happened to be Mr. Voorhees."

Zoe was stunned into silence. She wanted to ask why the client had not attributed their being together to business reasons, but dared not trust herself to speak.

"A very awkward situation," went on Bergman, blandly. "It being late Saturday afternoon, there was no business justification for your—ahem—proximity. And Kane had your arm and was looking at you with—er—quite unmistakable fervor."

Zoe got to her feet unsteadily.

"There's no truth in what you thought, of course," she said, thickly, trying to appear calm, "but I can leave at once to save you any further embarrassment."

Bergman raised a startled hand.

"Tut-tut—tut, my dear girl. We are very well pleased with your work. Mr. Kane left for Chicago today, too, so I'm sure of your discretion for the next few weeks. Aside from this little episode—inconsequential, perhaps—"

"I couldn't think of staying," Zoe said, hot and ashamed, "I shall leave at once."

Bergman was irritated.

"I repeat, I did not mean to dismiss you."

"But I'm resigning," Zoe said, evenly, "I am going right away."

"No, Miss Bourne, don't be silly," Bergman was exasperated, "I want you to stay. In fact, we were thinking of making things much more worth your while, once you understood this little point of etiquette I referred to."

"I'm going," insisted Zoe, "good-by."

She bolted from the room and, burning with the insult, hurried to collect her belongings. She left her half-finished work in a wire basket on her desk. Allan was the only one in the room and he raised inquiring brows as she hurried past. Zoe, summoning a smile, shook her head silently at him. She would never dream of telling any one the shameful incident. Cornell—she was positive he would believe the worst. A little pang shot through her, as she waited for the elevator. Now she might never see him again, unless he took the initiative and looked her up at Mrs. Horne's.

Well, her advertising career was over at any rate. She experienced a surprised satisfaction at the high-handed way she had managed it. She had never dreamed of herself as such a heady, hot-blooded person. She had thrown over a perfectly good job because of an insult, just the way girls do in books. It was rather gratifying. But now what was going to happen to her? She only had a few dollars left from last week's salary. Julie and Maisie would say she had been frightfully reckless. And she wouldn't dare mention it to Fania or Margot, or the rest

of the girls. They would certainly think there was something more in it. She would let it be known, in an offhand way, that she had quarreled with Mr. Bergman over some business detail.

After she got home, the impulse came to Zoe to write Kane and tell him about it, but she checked it. He would commend her step, she was sure, but she hardly dared think of him after this morning.

Maisie came scurrying in to see her before dinner. Her small freckled face was charged with excitement.

"Why didn't you tell me you were making a past?" she said, reproachfully. "What good is friendship if your friend holds out on you and you have to hear her scandal from somebody else?"

"What scandal?" demanded Zoe.

"Oh, it's all over the place," Maisie said, tossing her hat into the closet and sitting down on Julie's bed. "Christopher Kane and Zoe Bourne have been carrying on. Everybody remembers that Kane hired you in the first place and shoved you into the copy room with no experience at all, and so the general idea is that you have a handsome apartment on the Drive and Mr. Kane pays the bills. Somebody—I think it was Peggy—said that Mrs. Kane ought to be told. How would you fancy a career as a corespondent, dearie?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Zoe, startled out of her rather flattered composure. (After all is was something to be considered fascinating enough to break up a home!) Being named as correspondent—what would Bill Cornell think?

"Did—did everybody hear what they were saying?" she asked, sharply.

Maisie looked noncommittal.

"Don't see how they could help it, but I can't say. Those who weren't talking were listening and that office has got—you know what I mean—it's got acoustics."

Zoe knew then that Bill Cornell and the whole office were thinking the worst. Fine, wholesome fellows like Bill always believed things like that.

"He'll think now that I really am bad," Zoe told herself bitterly, "Al Schuler first, and now—this."

After a few days Zoe had other things to think of than how Bill Cornell would take the gossip about herself and Kane. Kane wrote her a brief, ironic note from Chicago, evidently having learned of the episode through some one in the office. He offered to help her find a new job, but Zoe decided that there was no use in making things look worse if people were out for scandal. So she applied at several offices on her own hook. It was not encouraging, for it seemed that the whole world wanted to get into advertising. Besides, she had no recommendation

from her last office. She would have died rather than refer them to Mr. Bergman.

She found the girls singularly sympathetic in her awkward predicament.

"You didn't have any trouble getting a job when you first came," Fania said curiously. "Why should it be hard now when you've had so much more experience?"

"I don't know," Zoe answered, bitterly. "When I tell them I have had nearly a year's experience they say, 'Ah, but you've only had one year of college. We require graduates.' If I lie and say I've a degree, then it's fresh high-school workers they want."

"Maybe you ask too much money," reflected Maisie.

"Forty," said Zoe. "If you're any good at all, you're worth that."

"You have to look as if you'd always been getting that, though," Julie said, shrewdly, "and that old coat of yours simply shrieks, 'Eighteen dollars a week and glad to get it!'"

Zoe colored resentfully, but finally admitted the truth of Julie's logic.

"You'd have a lot better luck if you got some new clothes," Julie continued. "You've got style and verve and things like that, but you can't overcome the lines of that three-year-old coat, Zoe, and there's no use trying."

"That's right," agreed Fania. Fania had left the art school to do "window-sketching" for a

department store. "Everybody always goes and gets a whole new wardrobe as soon as they lose a job."

"But how?" Zoe demanded, blankly.

"There's that," considered Julie. "Zoe didn't save any money from her royal—er—competence, and I'm in the hole myself waiting for this old musical comedy to go into rehearsal and Dad tightening up, too."

"Charge account. Use mine," said Fania. "It's all right at Altman's and Lord and Taylor's, but for heaven's sake don't mention my name at Wanamaker's. They think I'm dead and I wish I was so far as they're concerned. Then there are a couple of little shops I know where you could go and use my credit. Only remember me the middle of next month, darling. The fifteenth of the month following the purchase, you know, is the day of reckoning."

"Better do it, Zoe," said Julie, carelessly. "Fania's right. No business man ever hires anybody who looks as if she really needed a job. I've known girls who borrowed fur coats and diamonds and so on, and men fairly insisted on giving them jobs. Just because they looked as if they could get along perfectly well without one."

"In that case," said Zoe, helplessly, "will you give me your card, Fania? I'm sure to get a position within the next ten days—heavens, if I have to wait that long!—and I'll pay you

back at once. You see I'm just going to take anything, absolutely, anything I can find that pays me a salary."

"Might try theatrical work," suggested Julie, but Zoe was not impressed with the practicality of the idea.

The very next day Zoe started out shopping for a new coat. Now a perfectly simple coat would be exactly the thing if it were cut right. That would make her whole costume look smart. It was true, as the girls had said, that the most important thing in landing a job in New York was a good appearance. And a coat—only a coat—would do the trick.

But the coat department in the first store she entered was apparently in league with every other department in the store. The saleslady, one of those slim, boneless, svelte New York salesladies, had decided on the coat which looked best on Zoe. By an odd coincidence it proved to be the most expensive one in the group.

"It looks too elaborate for street," demurred Zoe, determined not to admit that she had seen the price tag.

The saleslady gave her a rather pitying smile.

"It's your shoes, dear," she informed Zoe. "Once you have some really smart looking gray suede shoes instead of those oxfords, you won't know yourself."

"I wanted brown instead of blue," Zoe added.

"But blue is your color, dear," the saleslady

said, gently. "Sallow people ought never to wear brown."

"But you see I wanted brown to match my hat," Zoe explained, letting the "sallow" thrust pass.

The saleslady stared at the hat, and Zoe became aware that, after all, she had only paid eight dollars for it.

"You mean—that hat?"

Zoe gave a short, embarrassed laugh and the saleslady looked relieved. She adjusted a hair in her flawless coiffure.

"Oh, I see you were joking. I thought you couldn't have meant that hat. Of course it's a perfectly good knockabout hat, but I was sure you couldn't have meant to wear it with any of our spring models."

"Just a knockabout," repeated Zoe, realizing that she would have to stop in the millinery department. She studied her image in the mirror again. It was a good looking coat and she was quite aware of its becomingness, but ninety-five dollars! Why she could never pay Fania back!

"It's—a little long," she said, faintly.

"The mode," said the saleslady, briskly. "Of course you have good legs and that's why you stick to the shorter skirts. But no one who has any regard for style—you know what I mean?—wears skirts above the eight-inch mark any more. You see this is exactly right. And that draped

effect at the side—a Jenny touch, of course—is exactly right for you. It hides your figure—or, you know what I mean—it makes you look a little plumper than you are. I'm thin, too, but I do have—er—curves.”

She patted her curves with delicate appreciation.

“Perhaps I am thin,” Zoe said, somewhat stiffly, “but frankly I don't think I want this coat. It's too——”

But the saleslady had silently turned her around to view the back, and Zoe could not truthfully say that the back of that coat was anything but a marvel of perfection. She couldn't help but get a job in that coat, and—Bill Cornell always liked girls to look nice.

Still she hesitated. There was no use trying to fool herself into believing that she could raise ninety-five dollars for Fania inside of three weeks. The saleslady was faintly irritated, and picked up the hem of the coat, revealing the soft gray silk lining.

“You see how that's finished? You'll never find that value any place else in town, dear. Not for under two hundred. I'm telling you the simple truth because I'd rather have you come back in a year or so and say, ‘Miss McCann, I want to thank you for selling me that lovely coat and I want to buy another one.’ You see I only want you to be satisfied. It's nothing to me, naturally, what you buy. And besides, I

want you to look chic. A girl as unusual looking as you are ought to take more pains with her appearance. No reason for you to look like an old maid till you're in your thirties, is there?"

Zoe absently permitted the innuendo to pass. She was seeing herself in a dozen different situations in that coat. It looked suave and elegant in its rich-piled texture and Parisian lines. That lovely soft fur, too.

"You don't want it?" asked the saleslady, briskly, making a move to help her off with it. "I'm afraid that's the best I can do under a hundred. Sorry."

Zoe watched her, torn with desire, take the coat away. She couldn't bear not to have that coat. She simply had to have it.

"I'll take it," she called quickly. "Send the old one, please. I'll wear this one."

After ninety-five dollars, ten for shoes and fifteen for an alluring, sophisticated little toque seemed paltry enough, although Zoe had to admit that, if she had actually had to pay cash for these articles instead of charging them to Fania's magic account, she would have considered them vastly overpriced. She could not resist wearing all of her new things out of the store, and so powerful is the influence of good clothes, Zoe actually felt there was no reason in the world why she shouldn't ask for sixty or seventy dollars a week at her next job. Allan Myers had once declared that was the thing to

do. He said nobody asked for less than fifty unless they really were no good. Employers knew it, too. If you asked for seventy-five a week, they knew you were good fifty or sixty dollar stuff. If you asked for thirty, they knew you were just that—thirty-dollar stuff.

“Of course,” Allan had conceded, “if he staggers your price, you can finally say how interested you are in his line of work, and how you would rather learn something new at a reduced salary than to hold out for a large sum.”

At the time, Zoe had been horrified at the idea. What! A person with only eight months' experience in advertising to triple her salary? It was unthinkable. She would never dare to ask it. But today, under the influence of her new clothes, she was not afraid to ask that much. She felt that she was really worth it. Why, think of the splendid copy she had written for that ungrateful old beast, Bergman! Hadn't Mr. Kane told her, too, that she was a born copywriter?

The thought of Bergman brought a wave of disgust over her. She had been too stunned and incredulous at the uprooting of her job to think of the incident much, but, occasionally, the shame of it overwhelmed her. She stood in the doorway of the store, only half aware of her new clothes, suddenly taken with a furious desire for revenge.

Why should she be caught in somebody else's

trap? What had she to do with old Bergman's code of etiquette or Kane's domestic connections? Why should she suffer for Bergman's silly scruples? Here she was—simply an employee in a certain office and, because she accepts an invitation to share a Fifth Avenue bus seat with a man from her office, she is insulted by her employer and has to resign from her job? It was childish. It might have been different if it had been Bill Cornell who was the married man in the case. She would have felt guilty just for being in love with him, whether she'd been compromised by him or not. And she would have been embarrassed instead of insulted at Mr. Bergman's insinuations because—because they might easily have been true. But Mr. Kane——

After a quick, unreasoning anger against Kane, for letting her into this disagreeable tangle, Zoe felt a wave of pity for him. He must have been frightfully ashamed when he found how Zoe had been dragged into his affairs. He, at least, knew how utterly blameless she had been and how Bergman's words must have offended her. It was too bad he need be so poignantly embarrassed—for he must be—but Zoe was satisfied to know that at least some one must realize how cruelly she had been treated.

A girl jostled Zoe and she awoke to her surroundings. She glanced in the shop window

and was recalled to her new wardrobe by the strangely familiar, smartly outlined image there. A surge of self-satisfaction swept over her. She elevated her nose a little and swept along the street as one accustomed to limousines. Really, there was nothing—nothing that could take away the consciousness of being well dressed!

Her ardor was dampened by calling in a few advertising offices she knew of and being refused. True, they did refuse her with respectful admiration for her costume, but—well, she didn't get a job. She started uptown toward another agency.

"Lo, Zoe," she heard a voice call, and saw Margot Waite behind her. Margot's rouge burned in round, artificial spots on her cheeks and the powder stood out purplishly on her usually attractive face. She had evidently been down all day and was tired out.

Zoe was not loath to have her costume admired, but Margot paid no attention to it.

"Just been making the round again. Selwyn's, Morosco, Schubert's, and the rest," she said, tucking her hand under Zoe's arm. "I'm sick of it. I'm dead broke and I owe Mrs. Horne three weeks' rent."

"What? You, too?" Zoe was somewhat heartened to know that other people had their troubles, too.

Margot nodded.

"There isn't a single reason why I shouldn't

go out and dive under an automobile. I'm a failure. I don't know why I hang on. But I'm almost at the end of things now. You can stand disappointment just so long and then——" Margot shrugged.

"I would never have the courage to finish things, though," said Zoe, shuddering, "even if I knew the future didn't hold a single bright spot for me, and right now I don't see that it does. But I wouldn't end things."

"I would," said Margot, abruptly, and then hastened on. "Will you come over to Packard's office with me? Might as well go to a couple of agencies while I'm down here. I haven't car fare enough to come down again tomorrow."

"I'm out of a job myself, and perfectly broke," said Zoe.

"You don't look it," said Margot. "You look like a million. Why don't you sign up at Packard's? They might have something you could get in."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Zoe, "but of course I daren't let any prospect of earning something slide."

Perhaps they might hand her a part at once and she would be a famous actress instead of a writer. Perhaps this was Destiny. Perhaps, when she became another Duse, she would look back on that moment as the turning point of her life. She took Margot's suggestion and they walked toward Broadway.

The theatrical agency office was not stimulating. Zoe, sensitized by her own failure, saw only veiled disappointment and hopelessness on the faces of the dozen waiting men and women. Margot, herself, on the verge of suicide, did not forget to rouge her lips mechanically before they entered the office. At a desk by the door sat a girl who, Margot told her, announced their names as they entered to the gods of the inner offices by means of some new sort of writing machine.

"And it actually does write it out the minute she sends in the name?" incredulously demanded Zoe, and Margot nodded.

The waiting applicants were separated from the private offices by a little fenced partition, behind which two office girls interviewed them and, if it so suited the powers, permitted them to go into the private office. Each time one of them sent a searching eye over the group, the waiting job-seekers would straighten up with desperate hopefulness and wait for the name to be called out. To Margot the two girls shook their heads in the negative. Zoe was permitted behind the fence to sign a card of application.

"Don't tell them you've had no experience," whispered Margot, "say you've done stock."

"We may have something later on in the week," said the girl to Margot. "Come in about Friday."

"All right," said Margot, wearily.

As they left the office, she turned to Zoe with a sigh of self-contempt.

"They've kept me going with their 'Come in about Friday,' for five years," she said, disgustedly. "The worst of it is, no matter how near I am to jumping in the East River, they have only to say that and I turn around and trot back for another slap in the face. I'm sick of it, I tell you. Sick of the whole damn mess!"

The hoarse sob in her voice frightened Zoe.

"But I tell you it can't go on forever. And I'm through! Do you hear, Zoe? I'm through with it!"

Zoe stopped short, carried out of her own troubles by the grim desperation in Margot's face.

"Let's walk," she said.

CHAPTER XIX

ZOE, as she took Margot's arm and walked across to Fifth Avenue, was frightened. Margot had been through the struggle and had found it led to nothing but the East River. Here was a girl who had been churned about in this whirlpool of ambition for years and at the end found bleak despair. Zoe felt a catch in her throat and wondered, terrified, if she, too, would come to that gray wall after she had gone on as long as Margot had.

They walked silently along Forty-second Street and turned up the Avenue. It was during that instant's lull that comes before the home-ward-bound shoppers begin to pour out from the great stores, and the offices to release their armies of workers. A few lights had come on along the street and sent a defiant, puny glow against the dying sun. The sounds of the city and its hurrying people seemed to have melted into one great windlike monotone that was as vast as silence.

"I love it," Zoe whispered to herself. No, surely, no matter what it did to her she could never lose her love of life. Yet here beside her was one who had felt that same zest at one time. Perhaps after a few years, if one's dreams failed. . . .

"How long have you been here, Margot?" Zoe asked.

Margot did not lift her tired, discontented eyes.

"Nine years," she said, "I'm twenty-eight. You're not in the profession or you'd know what it means to be twenty-eight without having gotten over—ever."

"But why?" asked Zoe, almost abstractedly. Other girls got on. It seemed strange that Margot and these girls at Mrs. Horne's never attained the success that a thousand very mediocre other girls did. Girls without the beauty, intelligence, ability, financial background of Mrs. Horne's group, too.

"Luck, Zoe, that's all," bitterly answered Margot. Her usually piquant, round face seemed to have taken on new lines, and Zoe winced at the incongruity of the woman's suffering in the eyes, and the pouting, childlike mouth.

"I suppose it's something besides luck," drearily went on Margot. "I've thought sometimes that the reason I failed was because I was always sure of a comfortable enough life whether I got on or not. If I was as broke nine years ago as I am now I would be successful by this time, I believe. You see you have to swallow your pride when it's a question of starvation. But Mother always told me I should hold out for the best parts and she kept sending me a good allowance. Sometimes things were a little tight, and

she'd have to sell some furniture or something to get money for me, but she said it was because our money was all tied up in stocks and things. I never dreamed there wasn't any more until she died—this summer you know. I guess I had used it all up."

Margot was silent for a moment. Zoe had a momentary irritation against this girl who had exacted such a sacrifice from her mother. At least her mother was not too proud to sacrifice something for her daughter's career, even if the daughter herself made no such sacrifice.

"She never had a fur coat in her life," Margot pursued, almost wonderingly. "I had four in the last ten years. You see, no matter what happens to you, a girl who wants to go on the stage can never afford to be shabby. If you don't eat for a week you have to look well dressed. I always did, but it didn't seem to do any good. I always looked nicer than any of the other girls in the offices. You can tell, you know."

"Didn't you even get an offer?" Zoe asked, in amazement. She noticed, preoccupiedly, that the streets were beginning to be crowded and the New York of the nighttime was beginning to stir itself faintly.

"Of course," Margot answered, impatiently, "everybody does. Chorus and vaudeville and little stock companies out in Utah or something like that. When you're poor you usually have

to take that sort of thing, but I wanted to do something big. I wanted to play on Broadway and have a good part. I wanted to be famous and wealthy and have everybody proud of me. Once I took a part in a vaudeville skit—I was desperate and money had been slow that year. But when the rehearsal was called, I—I didn't go. I couldn't bear it."

"The experience might have helped you," said Zoe.

Margot whirled on her almost angrily.

"Oh, you don't understand. Nobody would understand but a professional person. How could I go on in a ten, twenty and thirty act, playing the part of a little stage flapper when I wanted to play Hauptmann or Ibsen or Shaw? I didn't want to go on the stage as a business. I wanted it as an art. Can't you understand?"

Tears were in Margot's eyes and Zoe felt a wave of pity for this poor, pretty little failure. It had been on the tip of her tongue to say that she had failed only because she had never tried, but it wasn't true. Margot had tried. Zoe drew her back to her side, and Margot brushed her eyes swiftly.

"You do understand, I know," she apologized. "You're a dear. It's a relief to have some one I can talk to. After you've tried to bluff the world so long—I had to bluff even Mother, you know—it's heavenly to have some one you can trust with the truth. I wouldn't dare trust the

others at Mrs. Horne's. They'd act like a bunch of buzzards over dead meat. You do understand, though, why I couldn't take vaudeville or chorus? Once or twice I almost went into stock, too, but then Mother got some money in time so that I didn't need to and could afford to wait a little longer for a big opportunity."

"You should have done it, anyway—oh, I know you should have!" murmured Zoe, with conviction. This time Margot did not get angry at the reproach. She looked scowlingly at the trail of busses and taxis that blocked their progress at the Fifty-seventh Street crossing.

"I'll have to do it now, I suppose, if—if I can stick it out a while longer," she sighed. "Only now—you see I've turned down that sort of thing for so long that the agents never suggest it to me any more. And twenty-eight is old. Twenty-four is old, even, in our profession. If you're that old and haven't done anything to speak of, there's no use hoping."

"You don't look even twenty-four as a rule," honestly said Zoe. Margot paid no heed.

"I did a week of Chautauqua stuff once. It was ghastly. You know Rowena Shay? She's the sort of thing they want. And I've done a few readings at clubs and was in some benefit performance two or three times. I want to be something of more account than that, though."

She remembered her present circumstances and laughed sarcastically.

"It's time I was getting over it, now. I told you I owe Mrs. Horne. I owe a lot to a man at home, too. He used to want to marry me, but I've told him it was out of the question so many times that finally he's come to believe me. But he has helped me since Mother died—three hundred dollars. Of course I daren't let that go. Anybody else in the world. And there's more. I'm in deeper than you know."

Zoe pressed her hand. Margot, her eyes staring straight ahead, rushed on almost hysterically.

"There was a man, a manager, who always tried to make love to me. I liked him all right—he was better than most of them, but I knew he was married and he's nearly fifty anyway. But after last fall, after Fred's money ran out and I didn't know where I was going or how, I got desperate. Girls do, you know. And I knew he could make me a star if he wanted to and cut short this awful waiting. So one day I—well, I stayed with him one week end in Atlantic City."

Zoe's heart seemed to have stopped beating.

"I suppose it was a joke, if you could look at it in the right way," Margot went on presently. "He didn't offer to make me a star at all. He offered me money. I went off my head and he said he sometimes made his stars his mistresses but he didn't make his mistresses his stars."

Margot gulped, but set her mouth firmly and went on.

"I almost killed him, Zoe. He said he would give me a tryout some time in a small part, but I was too mad to take it up. But that affair has eaten on my mind until I'm almost insane. Nothing—nothing in the whole world seems to get me what I want. Not even—that."

Aching with pity for Margot, as she was, Zoe's reason kept demanding insistently why Margot or any one else should make such tremendous sacrifices to avoid work. She had admitted that she might have gone into the chorus or stock company or vaudeville and Zoe knew that stars were often picked from these byways all the time. Chorus girls obtained a single line and did it so well they secured a small part next time, and, in a little while, their names shone in electric lights on Broadway. She could understand why Margot avoided the chorus. But it must be sheer fear of work that kept her from stock company or the two or three a day vaudeville. Great actresses slaved for years in stock companies, feeling rewarded in the knowledge that they were enriching their abilities, broadening their scope, and preparing themselves for bigger things. Christopher Kane had told her that a true artist draws knowledge from the most sordid phases of his art as the sun draws vapor from refuse. And even her despised flapper rôle would have taught her stage presence.

"Poor Margot," said Zoe, softly. Her own

troubles seemed to blow away before this mountain of misery. In her mind was a lurking fear that, in ten years, she might be as much in the doldrums as Margot. But no, surely not, she told herself, if she kept working conscientiously toward her goal. If she—Zoe's eyes clouded as she realized, with terrific suddenness, that she was not truly working toward any goal, but was, like Margot, spending her time waiting for something great to come to her. She gripped Margot's arm. They were alike. She was as blind and stupid as Margot.

"And now—now there isn't any reason for anything," said Margot, in a small, tired voice. "I can't hope any more, even. And when there isn't any hope left you might as well die. One of these days I will——"

Margot's mouth grew sullen. Zoe dragged her across Seventh Avenue, toward Broadway.

"You're not going to do any such thing, do you hear?" she said, tensely. "You're not! You're not! You've got to try something—really try something first, Margot."

The girl's face flooded with color. She tugged at Zoe's lapels with her two hands.

"You'll help me, Zoe? You won't let me do anything foolish? You'll make me do things?"

"Of course."

CHAPTER XX

It seemed to Zoe that those next two weeks were endless. Encouraged by her new wardrobe, she had gone to a score of offices. She had tried department store offices and newspapers and agencies. She had left her name at employment agencies for plain, clerical work, but, in the few tips they had given her, she had arrived after the vacancy was filled. She had not dared, finally, to ask for more than thirty-five dollars. Spring was a bad season for advertising, and Zoe decided she would have to take less than that if she were to get work.

Even with her lowered purchase price her plight grew no better. It seemed one had to be a really good clerk in order to get even a clerical position. And the business college graduates, with their unbelievably small salaries, swamped the market now.

Fania Tell began to be uneasy about the big bills which Zoe incurred in her name, and reminded her that she would lose her credit if they weren't paid within the month of purchase. Zoe saw no prospect of paying them within six months, and she groaned over the vanity which had led her to follow Julie's advice. And there was five weeks' board due to Mrs. Horne, too.

Once out of sight of Fania's reproachful face and Mrs. Horne, however, Zoe was glad of her new clothes. No matter how blue or downcast she became, it was a comfort to know that she was well dressed. If only she didn't feel like such a sneak when she was around the house! At night, Zoe would sometimes cry for hours over the hot shame of being poor. It was her fault. She should never have come to New York. She should have stayed in Albion and been pleasantly mediocre. Through it all Zoe felt Bill's neglect. He had never even called her up. She had just slipped out of his life. How could he be so cruel when he must know how much she suffered? Perhaps he believed the tales Maisie said were afloat about the office regarding her relations with Kane. Then he would think she had only been amusing herself with him, and, having more than his share of masculine vanity, he probably decided to finish with her.

Thinking about Bill was devastating. She knew it must be love, because the mere thought of him poured the blood into her brain so that she could not reason about him. Was he clever? Was he really suited to her? Was he her true ideal? She couldn't tell. She only knew she was mad about him.

And then she missed Kane. There were so many things she wanted to talk over with him. She needed his understanding. He wouldn't say she was vain and foolish to take Fania's credit

to bolster up her self-respect. He would probably understand about Bill, too, only it was a difficult thing to talk about. No, she couldn't talk about Bill with Kane any more than she could talk about Kane with Bill. It was all a troublesome problem.

One day, acting on an irresistible impulse, Zoe went down to the stationery and cigar store in which Bill always stopped for cigarettes after office hours. It was in the building next to the office, and at another, saner time Zoe might have reasoned that there was no earthly excuse for her being in that store at five-thirty in the afternoon. But she was beyond excuses. She had to see Bill.

She pretended to be examining some stationery, yet she kept her eye on the entrance of the store, so that even if he should pass—but he would not pass. He always got cigarettes there, and Zoe felt that he never departed from a habit. When she finally did catch sight of his bland, fair face she was so nervous that she dropped the box of paper in her hand and fumbled ridiculously in picking it up. Tears blinded her eyes. She couldn't bear to look at him, lest she should break down for sheer joy in seeing him again. She felt him hesitate before asking for his Murads—he always got Murads—and knew that he had seen her. With an effort she looked up.

"Hello," she said, chokingly.

Cornell was plainly overjoyed to see her. He hurried to her side.

"Why—why—Zoe——" he blurted out, embarrassed.

"It isn't true—it isn't true," Zoe whispered. Cornell flushed.

"I guessed it wasn't true," he said, slowly. "Everybody always gossips. Always making trouble and everything. Only—only I thought maybe you'd been fooling with me as a sort of blind for people. I thought that for a while."

"Oh, how could you? I couldn't bear to have you think that," agonized Zoe. "Oh, dear."

Tears filled her eyes again, and she looked away quickly. In the mirrored walls she saw herself a dark, olive-skinned, strangely pretty girl, with dark, tragic eyes. She forgot to explain why she was in that store, or to make some apology to the waiting saleslady, but permitted Bill to lead her out of the store and down toward Fourth Avenue.

"That woman was staring so. Are you going up this way?" He was guiding her up Fourth Avenue now and Zoe made no demur. She was only conscious of the heavenly touch of his big, strong hand on her arm. Afterwards she blushed at the obviousness of her actions on that day. If she had only thought to give some reason for her being in that neighborhood! But she didn't and Bill seemed to take it quite as a matter of course.

They did not speak for three or four blocks, but as they came under the great black shadow of Madison Square Gardens, he pressed her arm gently.

"I did miss you," he said, simply, and Zoe half turned.

"Oh, did you?" she said, gratefully, catching her breath. He slipped his arm around her and bent down and kissed her. He kept his arm around her and then, at the corner, he peremptorily hailed a taxicab.

"Oh, I'm sorry," exclaimed Zoe, hesitating as he waited for her to get in, "I didn't want to get a taxi."

"Why?" he said, laughing, and gently lifted her inside.

"Because—oh, I don't know—because I knew you would," Zoe answered, plaintively. It was hard to explain why she wanted this man to avoid the bromidic business of taking a taxicab as soon as he conceived a desire to kiss his lady. It was somehow so efficient and downright. And when you're in love, you prefer wandering down dark streets and sneaking tiny kisses on shadowy corners, getting agonizing thrills from the touch of the other's hand before the unknowing world. Still, she did want him to kiss her. And if he selected a taxicab for the setting, well—a taxicab let it be.

"Well, then," comfortably commented Bill, and leaned forward to call to the driver, "through

the park and across to Eighty-third and Riverside."

It was a delirious ride. She sat in Bill's arms, his warm, frank, masculine kisses on her lips. When she finally reached the house she had forgotten everything in the world but him.

"When—when can I see you again?" asked Bill, holding both her hands. He was flushed and startled looking, as if he were amazed at himself for losing his jaunty self-possession.

"Whenever you like," dreamily answered Zoe.

"Well—this is Tuesday. I'm engaged Wednesday and Thursday. Shall we say Friday?"

Zoe was roused to a flare of wounded pride, then. After this she could not bear to think of a day slipping by without seeing him but he—he deliberately put their next appointment three whole days off. Zoe's tiny flare died down when she looked at his mouth again. Such a strong, resolute, adorable mouth.

"Friday, then," she murmured, and floated, star-eyed, into the house.

On Thursday morning Zoe was called to the telephone at Mrs. Horne's and heard Bill's agreeable voice on the wire.

"You know, Zoe," it began, rather awkwardly, "I find I made a slip about our date. Friday I'm supposed to have dinner with my aunt on Long Island. How about Saturday, instead?"

Zoe felt a pang of desolation. He didn't love

her at all. He was making excuses. She ought to say, "Don't bother. We'll just call it off." Or the cutting thing to do would be to say, casually, "Why no, Bill, I'm afraid I can't manage Saturday. I'll be busy over the week-end and Monday and—well, how about making it a week from Saturday?"

That was the technically correct thing to do, according to the girls' code. It showed how independent one was of any one man. But love disarmed a woman and all Zoe could say was, weakly, "Very well, Saturday." She hung up the receiver, disgusted with herself and sick with disappointment over his apparent lack of eagerness to see her again. Why, no matter what he had planned to do, after that night with her he should have dismissed everything for her—that is, if he truly loved her. Zoe tried to think of a reason for his procrastination that would not hurt her pride so much. He did like her. He had kissed her. He had been shy and embarrassed around her, the way men of his type are when they love some one. But Zoe hated the will-power that was stronger than her charm. Love, true love, made a man forget everything, fling everything to the winds. Love did not equivocate with the beloved. Postponements had no place in love. Not, at least, in Zoe's conception of love.

"I'll bet he's the kind that would never forget himself long enough to kiss his wife in pub-

lic, no matter how long he'd been away," Zoe said to herself, grimly.

Perhaps he did not want to see her again too soon for fear she would take him for granted and begin making a hope-chest. As a matter of fact this venture was as near the truth as Zoe ever came, for Bill Cornell was doing his masculine best to fight the queer fascination which Zoe Bourne had for him. Not being an analytical person, he could not analyze her to shreds and free himself of her witchery. He only felt troubled and afraid. He was afraid if he kissed her again he would commit himself to something. He might—he might even ask her to marry him, and Bill didn't want to be swept into anything like that without any preparation. She was so demure, for all her vividness, when one looked at her. As if nothing disturbed her very much. And then to feel her lips—warm, intoxicating, compelling. Bill decided on discretion.

Even if she had been fully aware of this, Zoe would have been wounded that he had enough control left to be able to resist coming to her. It was hard to understand how men could be so different from women in love. She wished she could hate him, so that she could detach herself from him long enough to "work on him" as Fania crudely put it. She had confided in part to Julie Saturday night as she was getting dressed for Bill, but Julie was not sympathetic.

"You ought to be glad you can care enough

for anybody to make yourself miserable over him," said Julie, discontentedly. "Look at me, now, absolutely without a man for the first time in years and I feel like a squeezed sponge—flat and vapid. This business of being Fleurice's prize model is all right so far as the prospects go—I wouldn't stay a minute if she hadn't promised to send me to Paris in May—but you never meet any men. Except, of course, that old Wagenstein. It's much nicer to be in love, even when it's painful, than high and dry and safe from storms, like I am."

Zoe was silent. She was not going to insist on Julie's sympathy, but it was cruel of Julie to act as if being in love with Bill was just a little flare and as if there would be a lot more men she would feel just the same way about. She, at least, wasn't one of those will-o'-the-wisps.

Maisie bobbed her head in the room for an instant, bursting with news.

"The Kanes have got a divorce," she reported, exuberantly, "and your dear Christopher is out West getting connected with some firm that he's to represent in London. Nice?"

"What?" Zoe exclaimed, feeling suddenly very lonely. Christopher Kane in London?

"Yes, and old Bergman is mad as hops all the time nowadays," went on Maisie, "and so is Bill Cornell."

"Wonder why he's cross?" speculated Zoe.

Maisie looked wise.

"And Blanche What's'ername is cross, too. She does her best but she can't seem to get a rise out of Bill. So does Peggy. I guess he did take Peggy out to lunch Wednesday but——"

"When?" flared Zoe.

"Wednesday," repeated Maisie, in surprise, "why?"

Zoe was silent. He had taken Peggy out to lunch the very day after he had kissed her! That was all Zoe Bourne meant to him. She was simply a girl whom he had casually kissed. That was all romance meant to Bill Cornell. A kiss or two in a taxicab and the next day he takes another girl out to lunch. Love? He couldn't love her at all.

"Good Lord, Zoe," exclaimed Julie, sharply, as Zoe slumped in her chair, "you act as if you'd never been in love before."

"I haven't."

"Well, even if you haven't, men want girls to have control. This sniffing Victorian stuff doesn't go with men nowadays and you're clever enough to know it. I'm ashamed of you, Zoe, for being such a little idiot over anybody. It isn't as if you wouldn't be all over it next week and in love with somebody else—your Mr. Kane, for instance—because you know you will."

"I don't care," said Zoe, pathetically. "What I feel next week or next year doesn't have anything to do with the way I feel tonight. And I don't like being in love. It hurts too much."

I'm going to—to," she made an effort to sound businesslike, "get absorbed in a career and never—never—never love anybody."

"That's what the really successful women do, old dear," Maisie said, slapping her on the back boisterously. "Give the gents the berry every time and stick to their knitting. Decorate your sofa with 'em when you fancy it, but don't let 'em cramp your line. Use their fat old necks as stepladders and when you get to the top, kick out and fly. After you've arrived you can fall in love, but not before or you never will arrive. No kidding."

"Hear, hear," Julie applauded mildly and Zoe laughed, in spite of herself. "Anyway Zoe doesn't love Bill any more than anybody ever loves anybody."

"You don't know," Zoe retorted, angrily.

Julie shrugged, daintily.

"I'm being nasty about it because I don't want you to make a fool of yourself over anybody. You're just in the mood to go down and throw yourself on his chest and give yourself away. You ought to have him trotting after you and eating out of *your* hand instead of your being the little poodle."

"You don't care whether he loves me or not," said Zoe, shaking her head, mournfully.

"I do," Julie answered, impatiently, "I want you to get engaged to him. Of course the only way to know whether you really want a man

or not is to marry him, but the next best way is to get engaged to him. You never know what you don't want until you've had it. And after you've eliminated a lot of things that way you'll come down to the thing you really do want."

Julie went out of the door and slammed it behind her.

Zoe sat waiting for Bill to call for her. He said they might go to a theater. She wanted, really, to talk to him somewhere instead, but there was no place to go, and, besides, they seemed such miles apart when they talked together. Funny. She had been in Bill's arms but she did not know him half as well as she did Christopher Kane or even Allan Myers. She heard, then, the bell announcing his arrival and, with a final dab of powder, rushed down the steps to meet him.

He was standing by the little house switch-board, his back to the staircase, and Zoe came up behind him.

"I didn't know you were there," he exclaimed, carefully guarding the surprised pleasure in his eyes. Why was he always so afraid she would see that he liked her? Zoe was irritated at his discretion. "Where shall we go? Want to see 'East is West'?"

Zoe, in the excitement of seeing him again, forgot that he had lunched with another girl the very day after he had made love to her. Indeed she forgot that she had seen 'East is West' with

Fania only a few weeks before, and had not been so taken with it that she wanted to see it more than once. She even sat through part of the first act, so blissfully oblivious of everything but her escort that she did not recognize the play.

On his part, Bill seemed to be absorbed in the stage. He laughed whole-heartedly at the spots where every one laughed, and vigorously applauded the bits that every one else applauded.

"Great play," he beamed at Zoe.

Zoe had not fancied this conventional Broadway table d'hôte fare at all. She cast a side glance at Bill. Yes, he actually was enjoying the thing! He chuckled at "Cholly Young" and at Miss Bainter's shimmying.

"You know there's nothing does you more good than a really good play," Bill said in a low aside. "You ought to take more interest in the theater, Zoe. But then, you women never think of anything but fussing."

Zoe sat bolt upright and stared at him, incredulously. Ought to take more interest in the theater? Why, he had spoken as if he considered her a moron like Peggy or Blanche or the rest of the girls he knew! Never thought of anything but fussing! A slow indignation swept over her.

"I expect to write plays," she said, coldly. "I thought you knew."

"Is that so?" Bill's interest in her artistic ambitions was so perfunctory that Zoe was in-

furied. She remembered now that he had not even asked if she had found a new job. He wasn't interested in what women thought about or what they did, except as it affected his life.

"Naturally I've always been interested in the theater," Zoe pursued. It was amazing how little this man knew her. He didn't care what she was interested in, so long as she was good looking enough. He thought he had brains enough for them both—whereas he wasn't half as intelligent as she was—not half—and she didn't dare show it or he would hate her!

"Knew you'd like it," Bill said, comfortably. "Playing to crowded houses every night. Shows it's pretty good."

"I don't see that it shows a thing," Zoe said, contrarily. "Most people aren't intelligent enough to know whether a play's good or bad. Their presence doesn't prove anything. Some of the best plays have empty houses night after night."

She knew she was playing the wrong cards to win this man, but if she had to pretend to be a moron in order to have him love her, then she didn't care whether he loved her or not. She simply was not going to be patronized like that—"ought to be interested in the theater"—when she was planning to spend her whole future writing for it! Why any one who was worth her love would have been sufficiently interested to keep her secret goal in his mind. He acted as

if it was of no importance—the very thing that had brought her to New York.

There is something about seeing one's beloved in a crowd which enables one to see for a moment quite clearly his or her imperfections. It is that which accounts for the involuntary criticisms wives and husbands make of each other in public. Now Zoe, seeing Cornell not as a glorious, god-like person, but only as a blond young man in a crowded theater, laughing at the same things that every other young man there was laughing at, and missing the same things that every other young man missed, wondered, quite detachedly, how it would be to go through life with him. He never would attempt to sympathize with her ambitions. To hold his love she would be obliged to feed his vanity by looking up to him. If she revealed an atom of intellect he would hate her.

"Mind if I go out and smoke during intermission?" Zoe was recalled to the theater by Bill's gentle pressure on her arm. Of course he would go and smoke. No matter what the occasion might be he would do the conventional thing, Zoe thought, with a certain resignation. She looked around the theater after he left, and, for a moment, she thought she saw Kane, and was stricken with shame at having him see her with such an inferior person as Bill Cornell. It wasn't Kane, however, and she was immensely relieved. Bill sat down then, for the third act.

"Have you seen the Follies this year?" he asked her. "They're awfully good. Of course it's nothing but musical comedy, but a man has to have a little relaxation once in a while. Most of the time, though, I like a good, solid little play like this, or like 'Friendly Enemies' last year, you remember. Gives you something to think about."

"What?" asked Zoe.

"What?" Bill was taken aback. "Why, why—well, take these international marriages and—and white slave trade and—and things a person ought to give a lot more thought to. I like a good play. I like good music, too."

"You do?" asked Zoe, apprehensively.

"Sure, I do," Bill answered, with pride in his varied interests, "all kinds. Not that I like opera, but I guess if the truth were known not many people do."

"But—'Tristan!' " Zoe exclaimed, remembering one gorgeous evening at the Metropolitan in Enna's seat.

"Don't care about it," Bill shook his head with an air of finality. "There's only one opera that I like and that's——"

"'Il Trovatore?'" Zoe asked, fearfully.

"How did you know?" beamed Bill.

"I could guess," answered Zoe, faintly.

The curtain went up and Zoe sat, depressed, through the last act. Beside her sat a healthy, good looking, but very stupid young man.

CHAPTER XXI

ON Monday morning Margot came in with the good news that the theatrical agency had left a message for them to report at Fort Lee to do extra work in a moving picture. They spent some time collecting evening clothes stipulated for the picture. Zoe was thrilled. Supposing the director picked her out as a type and she became a great motion picture actress!

"I'd like to know how they think we can get there by twelve when they didn't notify us till ten," grumbled Margot, when they finally had scrambled aboard the Fort Lee ferry, their costumes in Julie's big suitcase.

"Still, it's seven dollars a day," said Zoe, hopefully. "Even if we do have to pay the agent a commission, it means something."

"Cheap stuff," muttered Margot.

Once on the Jersey shore, Margot, who had extra-ed once before, hurried Zoe to a street car which took them through three or four miles of country until they finally reached Fort Lee. Margot was pessimistic, but Zoe was elated, sure that this was a great moment in her life. At the studio, a boy directed them to a dressing room where they hurried into their evening clothes—Zoe wearing Rowena Shay's best pink tulle. A

few other belated extras were getting dressed, too, and Zoe saw that they were making up with the most scrupulous care. Margot boldly asked one of them to loan her her make-up box.

"I suppose so," said the woman, ungraciously, shoving her box toward Margot. Margot winked at Zoe and proceeded to mascara her eyes, and put queer looking powder on her face. Zoe surreptitiously used the same box.

"Don't rouge," languidly said one of the other women, "Mr. Bush will send you back. It takes black, you know."

The boy came to the door, shouting that Mr. Bush wanted everybody on the set right away. As they started up the stairs, they heard a full orchestra begin a tantalizing fox trot, and Zoe looked at Margot in surprise. Then they came into a huge studio, filled with tables at which sat men and women in evening dress of varying modes, their faces purple and saffron under the glare of the great lights above them. Indeed, except for the discarded props at one end of the room, the place looked like an enormous cabaret grill room.

"All right, George," howled a hoarse voice through a megaphone. Zoe saw a short man with a massive head and tangled gray hair standing on a table at the far end of the room. At his words the music stopped. The lights were replaced by other lights under which the people resumed their normal complexions. "You two

girls—now—sit down there at that table. Yes, you. You're late enough. Where you from—Rogers?"

Margot called out, in answer, the name of their agent, and they sat down at a table with a pallid, anemic looking, young juvenile.

"Big cabaret scene," he said. "You're lucky in not coming from Rogers. He made us be here at eight this morning and here it is twelve-thirty and they haven't done a thing yet but shout around. I'll bet they keep us here till midnight, too, but they won't keep me, I'll tell you."

"Why?" asked Margot, idly.

"I have to be at the Winter Garden at seven-thirty tonight," elucidated the young man, fixing his humorless gray eyes on Zoe, "I'm in the chorus and I told Mr. Rogers that I had to leave early. But they'll raise a fuss, anyway. You see. You two are in chorus, aren't you?"

"No," briefly answered Margot.

Zoe fingered a menu card from Churchill's and looked about. There was something faintly nauseating about the studio with its queer light, which gave a decadent pallor to all the people. They were a strange, morbid looking lot, too—women with dyed hair, smooth faces and wrinkled necks—huge-bosomed, slender-calved women with querulous, tinkly voices. The men were like their own companion, Zoe thought—pale-eyed, weak-mouthed, limp and repulsive

creatures. Here was an imitation Mary Pickford, Dorothy Gish or Douglas Fairbanks from among the younger types. At a table near by two men sat with their arms locked about each other, fatuously grinning. Zoe felt as if she had entered a half-world remote from her own life and it sickened her oddly. Margot seemed to be mildly entertained by it and had quite recovered from her bad spirits.

"Funny to think they have that orchestra just to make us feel in a real cabaret mood," she whispered to Zoe. "Do you know, I just heard somebody say that Paige Fothergil and Mary Marigold are to play the leads in this? They're down at that table near the orchestra. She's really very pretty, isn't she?"

The man with the grisly hair and the megaphone had stepped down from his platform and was making his way to the table that Margot had pointed out as the leading one. As he passed their table the limp juvenile plucked his sleeve.

"Mr. Bush, don't forget I have to leave at seven tonight in order to get to my theater. Last time I had to leave early you made a fuss and Rogers gave me an awful razzing, but I explained to Mr. Lovell——"

"That's all right, Freddie," said Bush, absently, and then stood for an instant looking over the room. He broke out a minute later, irritatedly, "But you've got to do a bit here,

Freddie. You've got the only dress suit in the place that's been made since the ark. Damn Rogers. I told him I wouldn't touch any more of his gang if he didn't make 'em dress right. A fashionable cabaret. Hell! It looks just like what it is—a bunch of cheap extras in second-hand clothes."

He signaled the orchestra leader and then glanced at Zoe and Margot. He put his hand on Margot's shoulder and spoke to the one man who had a correct evening suit. "Now, Freddie, you and this little girl get up and dance when the fox trot begins. Then Mr. Fothergil and Miss Marigold will get up. You"—he spoke to Margot, "nod and smile to Mr. Fothergil, Miss——"

"Margot. Margot Wai——" began Margot, but the director cut her short.

"All right, Margot. You smile over your shoulder to Fothergil as you dance, sort of flirting. See? Then Miss Marigold catches you at it. They've just been quarreling. Hey, Pat, what's the matter with that orchestra lighting? I want those palms to show, not stuck back of the piano, there. And then Miss Marigold glares at you, see, and you, Miss——oh, yes, Margot—you duck behind your partner's shoulder. See?"

"But—what——?" Margot was in a panic but the director had moved on, yelling orders as he went.

"She got a bit, did you hear that?" came in envious whispers from all sides and Zoe had a vague realization that getting "bits," such as the one assigned to Margot, was the great goal of the extras.

"What shall I do—what shall I do?" said Margot in a frightened whisper to Zoe, and Zoe confessed that she herself would be scared to death at the distinction of winning a "bit."

"He won't tell us any more," said Freddie, gloomily. "You just have to get up and then he bawls you out."

From the other tables Zoe caught a babel of conversation.

"Yes, lots of people think I look just like June Caprice, but I don't know. Of course it was my eyes that made me go into the pictures in the first place. Every one said they were so unusual."

And again——

"I had an offer to go to Hollywood—two hundred a week—but you know how Papa is. He just wouldn't hear of it."

Zoe had a great desire to share her amusement in this colossal shamming with some one who would see it as she saw it—Christopher Kane, for instance.

"Into the picture!" the megaphonic order came, and some waiters in yellow paper aprons hurried among the tables to take imaginary orders. The orchestra began to play.

"Yellow takes white, you know," Freddie explained to them.

At the next table a fat man called for four more Martinis and the waiter rushed away to return with a tray and four pink glasses. Zoe marveled at the miraculous change from the listless conversation of a minute ago to the gay cabaret illusion. Another man, a rather elderly, ordinary looking person, sat down at their table. Margot, gasping, got up and followed her languid escort to the dance circle. Zoe saw Fothergil and Miss Marigold get up to dance, and saw Margot's roguish nod to the former. She was amused at the round-eyed awe in Margot's face when she was caught in her flirting by the screen bride of Mr. Fothergil and the funny way she ducked behind Freddie's shoulder.

"Not bad, that bit," approved Zoe's present dinner companion.

Zoe was increasingly amazed at the ease with which Margot reproduced her expression for the ten or twelve times that the scene was repeated. Fothergil was scolded violently, but Bush shouted from his throne at the back of the room, "Good girl, Margot," to the envy of the other three hundred and forty-nine extras. Zoe felt herself getting drowsier and drowsier under the artificial glare and the studio was cold to her décolleté shoulders. She wanted to go home, but her partner told her that she would have to stick it out now. He told her that he was

an old trouper, himself, "resting now, as they say."

"It's six now," he said, looking at his watch. "In an hour they'll let us go down to the lunch room and get a bite to eat, and then they'll probably keep us here for the night. They often do, you know."

Zoe thought to herself that her seven dollars was to be really earned at any rate.

"Do we pay for our own dinner?" Zoe demanded.

"Sure," the man replied. "Think they give us anything here?"

Zoe said nothing. She was hungry and she knew Margot must be, for they had had nothing to eat since breakfast. And Margot was as poor as she was, for they had only brought enough money to pay their fare home. It was plain that they would have to go without dinner, and then if the thing lasted all night, as this trouper predicted—and he ought to know——

Zoe and Margot sat hungrily in the dressing room when Bush gave the order to file down to the lunch room for dinner.

"I'm just famished," wailed Margot.

"And think of that cold ride home on the ferry boat with nothing to eat," shuddered Zoe. "I hope we don't ever have to see this awful place again."

"I shouldn't mind," said Margot. "Freddie—you know who I mean—said I might get as high

as twenty dollars a day for that bit I did. In that case I can afford to eat enough from now on to stand most anything."

It was while the crowd was in the lunch room that Zoe saw Al Schuler. He was in evening dress with a great cloak thrown over his arm and he was standing in the doorway looking for some one. Catching sight of the electrician, he called out, crisply, "Where's Bush?"

"Downstairs, Mr. Schuler." The electrician hurried to his side, deferentially.

Zoe looked away quickly after her first stare. Of course he wouldn't recognize her from that drunken dinner in the Village. She remembered now that he had film interests and—why, of course—he owned the Peerless Studios in which they were now working. She heard him ask for Miss Marigold. Then, unexpectedly, her eyes met his and his face lit up in recognition. He came toward her, Zoe blushing furiously all the while.

"If it isn't my little Christmas angel," he exclaimed, taking her hand in his soft, perfumed one. "I never expected to find you again. Why didn't you tell me you were in pictures?"

"I wasn't then," Zoe answered, noting, a little amusedly, the contrast between her remembrance of him and the foppishly groomed gentleman of tonight, "I'm just an extra."

"I don't want to spoil your career as an extra," Schuler said, not releasing her hand, his gaze

traveling appreciatively from her young face to her ankles, "but I wish I could persuade you to cut it and run out with me. I just drove over from town. Thought I'd drop in and see how things were, then run on to the Club for the night. How about dashing off for a ride and supper? I'll fix it with Bush."

"No, you see I'm with a friend," Zoe stammered, indicating Margot, "and I couldn't possibly."

Schuler's pinkly massaged face betrayed chagrin. He produced a small gold pencil and cardcase from his pocket and held up the pencil, interrogatively.

"Another time? How can I reach you? Perhaps we could dine together, say—next Wednesday?"

Zoe hesitated. Why? Why shouldn't she have a little excitement in her life? It was dull enough, lately. She gave her address in a low tone. She wasn't sure about Wednesday, but—perhaps.

Al vanished downstairs after a final pressure of her hand and another lingering glance at her slim shoulders above the filmy pink tulle.

"Who's the sugar daddy?" Margot demanded.

Zoe answered very briefly, a little ashamed of herself for being glad he had remembered her.

In half an hour the crowd was back again and once more the orchestra began its syncopated inspiration. There was a scene between the

hero and the heroine, during which the crowd sat watching and applauding the Japanese acrobats brought to the studio from the Palais Royale to lend reality to the cabaret scene. After the many wearying repetitions, punctuated by long waits while the director and the chief electrician held arguments and Miss Mari-gold indulged in a tantrum because Bush criticized her eyebrows, the director finally yelled that the day was finished. He marked a certain line near the dance arena and announced that all the tables on the left side of that line were to report at eight in the morning.

"But it's three o'clock now," some one said. Zoe and Margot, who were weak from hunger and fatigue, exchanged glances. To come back to that place in five more hours?

"And there isn't any ferry till four," wailed somebody else.

Zoe prayed that their table might be exempt. She would not dare turn down the extra money if their table actually were in demand, but she felt she could not endure that stifling, horribly unreal atmosphere again. As a matter of fact, their table was out, but Bush called out:

"Where's Margot?"

The extras enviously pointed out Margot and Bush strode toward them.

"You ride horseback?" he demanded. Margot nodded.

"Then I want you for a nicer bit, tomorrow.

You won't be needed in this set. Wear your riding togs and have a crop. It will be just you and Miss Marigold and Mr. Fothergil. Very good little piece of comedy, too."

Zoe was exhausted and so was Margot—too exhausted to appreciate the good fortune that was making her detested by every other extra in the room. As they started, *en masse*, out of the studio, some one cried out, "How about double time for overtime? Hey, Bush, how about it?"

"Time and a half," answered Bush, curtly.

"Double time—double time——" the crowd began to roar. Bush looked them over with infinite disgust. They began surging around him. Zoe and Margot heard his sharp voice above the uproar.

"Go home, I tell you. Call at your agent's tomorrow and get your damned money. Time and a half for overtime."

"We get it tomorrow?" a woman's voice shrieked, hopefully.

Bush nodded. The tumult died. Evidently time and a half paid tomorrow was far better than double time paid at the end of the week.

On the ferry Margot and Zoe huddled together, their noses purple with the icy morning wind up the river and conscious only of their tremendous fatigue.

"I've never been on a horse in my life," confessed Margot, "but I can wear Fania's habit

and it's stunning enough to excuse anything."

Back at Mrs. Horne's they sneaked down to the kitchen and found a basket of hot rolls just left by the baker. They hastily made some tea and ate before Clematia should descend on them. They went upstairs after eating and Zoe sank on the bed and mumbled an inarticulate affirmative to Margot's request for Julie's alarm clock.

"You can sleep, but I have to be up in an hour and a half," whispered Margot, with a wary glance at Julie's sleeping figure. Julie, her white arm flung over her golden head, looking like a sleeping choir boy, stirred then, and Margot hastily went out. Zoe heard the door close softly and then drifted off to sleep. Afterwards, when Margot's name was emblazoned over the world as one of the first five in motion pictures, Zoe always remembered that first and only venture of hers in the screen world.

CHAPTER XXII

ZOE slept all through that day and that night and it was really Friday morning before she felt completely rested. She wanted to stay in bed then, but Julie insisted that she get up and have breakfast with her.

"You ought to go out and walk. You look ghastly," said Julie. "Margot looks worse than you do. She says she's lost ten pounds already. She worked all that next day and half the night again. But she did get her contract."

"Contract?" dazedly repeated Zoe.

"Going to Hollywood next week. Three hundred a week," went on Julie, imperturbably. "I gather from her modest story that she made Marigold look like two cents and Bush is crazy about her. Thinks she's the greatest screen comedienne ever born. Going to star her in a series of domestic comedies—just a small cast."

Zoe was so startled by this news that she ate breakfast in a trance, paying no heed to Julie's confidences concerning Mr. Wagenstein, who, it seems, was not so bad after all, and very, very rich, and anyway you can't be so particular when you haven't been out to dinner for eight days.

"Margot!" Zoe kept exclaiming wonderingly. That was the way things happened. And only three weeks ago Margot had been on the verge

of suicide. It was a strange, strange city, this New York. Perhaps Life had something wonderful to surprise her, Zoe, with very soon. Perhaps she would meet some one who would set her to writing plays.

Coming down to reality, Zoe saw that there was a small heap of bills on her tray. There was Mrs. Horne's ominously brief bill—"70.00" for five weeks' lodging, breakfast and dinner. There was a bill addressed to Fania Tell from a department store, but suggestively underlined by Fania and turned over to Zoe. One hundred and thirty-two dollars—coat, shoes, hat and gloves. There was a little note from Enna, still at the Art Club, gently reminding Zoe that she owed her five dollars and Enna would really like to have it that day as she was a little short this week.

"I don't know what to do," said Zoe, on the verge of tears.

Julie was putting on her small purple toque and turned around.

"Come to Paris with me and we'll run away from all our creditors," she suggested. "Or perhaps you can get a job as model down at Fleurice's. Still, you're only five feet two, aren't you? Fleurice likes them five feet six. Don't worry about your bills, Zoe. Look at Margot. She was in as deep as you are, and here she falls into a piece of luck that will put her on her feet all at once. And how about Amy

Bruce? *The Times* says she opened in a new play in Atlantic City and has knocked 'em all cold. 'Superb emotional actress!' New York all agog waiting for the play to get here. See what her emotions did for her, when directed the right way."

"Perhaps you have to learn how to abandon yourself to your feelings—good or bad—in real life, before you can do it convincingly on the stage," said Zoe, dryly. "But, Julie, that was sheer luck with those two girls. And luck just doesn't happen to me."

"Of course it can," Julie said, and picked up her gloves. "I must run along. I'm lunching with David today, by the way. That's Monsieur Wagenstein."

Zoe pushed her breakfast tray to one side, and reached for her bedroom slippers. She regarded her image pessimistically in the mirror. Nine dollars and ninety-five cents for that silly orchid nightie with the lace berth. It was pretty—of course it was pretty! But she had no business with pretty things. Nothing nice ever happened to her—like three hundred dollars a week, for instance—that would justify such extravagances. If she ever got a job again, she would certainly save fifteen dollars a week, rain or shine. Ten, at least. Then, after she'd worked several years she would have saved—about a thousand dollars. Bah! Might as well spend it and be happy.

If she could only get a job! But if she did, how could she pay back the two hundred and fifty dollars out of the miserable little salary she would get? Zoe mechanically went to the dresser and selected Julie's best imported soap for her bath, and a large jar of "4711" bath salts. She went into the bathroom, and slid meditatively into the tub, after pouring half the bottle into the water.

If there were only some one she could talk things over with. If Kane would call her, for instance. He would understand and would help her know what to do. But he no longer belonged in her life. He would be kind to her if she went to him, but she could scarcely do that after all this fuss at the office. Even if he had the divorce which Maisie had spoken of.

"I'll have to see if I can get a job filing for a while—at least through the summer," Zoe thought drearily. "At least I could make eighteen dollars a week to keep me from owing any more. It really doesn't matter what you do, when you can't do the thing you want anyway. And I never will be a playwright, anyway. No one expects me to, so no one will be disappointed."

Filing. To have to say she was a file clerk instead of a writer. Zoe winced, but Fania's bill before her drove her on. She dressed hurriedly and went over to the subway. At the gate she realized that she had not a single penny to

her name. She had owed and paid Maisie the money Margot had obtained for her at the agency. She turned around and came up. After all it wasn't so far to Thirty-first Street where the filing agency was. She could walk it in an hour or so.

Zoe started walking down Broadway. At Fifty-seventh Street she switched to Fifth Avenue. Its spaciousness soothed her.

She looked mechanically in the windows of the art galleries. In Kraushaar's was a Gifford Beal showing. Across the street in Ehrich's window was a Zuluaga. In Wildenstein's she saw a Picasso exhibition announced.

"I could go and enjoy any of those things as much as if I had a million dollars," Zoe meditated with a little spurt of exultation. "I could walk in and say, 'What line! What color! What clouds!' and no one would guess I didn't have the fare home."

No one could take from her the satisfaction of having had a complete breakfast, too, she gloated, or of wearing smart clothes, or of being young! So long as one had those things, New York could do very little to you.

She walked along more buoyantly, but it struck her suddenly that after all Mrs. Horne could put her out. What could she do, then? Julie would help her. Maisie would help her. Panic seized her as the thought came that they would not help. She could not blame them,

either. Julie needed her money for clothes, and Maisie didn't have any funds to spare. Margot was away and Fania—oh, no, one couldn't go to Fania. If Mrs. Horne should put her out! Why, she hadn't even carfare to go anywhere. She'd rather starve, of course, than appeal to her family.

Looking up and seeing Fifth Avenue converging into a tiny point far down, Zoe felt frightened. It was as if the two great walls of high buildings were slowly pressing her in, and each step brought her nearer to her certain doom. Way down there—it must be around Thirty-first Street, they would have her squeezed to a quivering pulp between their great stone fronts.

Desperation seized Zoe. She began to run, dodging through little groups and around staring, mink-clad women.

"Hold on there," a voice cried.

It was Allan Myers.

"Oh, I'm so glad," half-sobbed Zoe, brushing her eyes as if to rid them of nightmare. "I never was so glad to see any one."

Allan's thin, sardonic face twisted into a smile.

"If I thought that was true," he said, half-speculatively. "You looked scared, Adorable. And why haven't you let me come and take you out somewhere?"

"I was always out when you came," Zoe answered, almost truthfully. She realized the necessity of putting up a bluff. It would never

do for any one from her old office, even a sympathetic person like Allan, to guess her straits.

"I—I'm just seeing about a position and I'm in a frightful rush."

"But, my dear girl, running on Fifth Avenue——" Allan's voice was half mocking. "I thought you had given up your job to freelance. Hoped you would take a studio in the Village—preferably, of course, in my house—and write your plays there. I suppose you'll do a few potboilers before you really get going."

Zoe looked at him, startled. It was queer that she had not thought of doing that very thing. It was what was expected of would-be writers. She was disappointed in herself that the idea had not occurred to her. Perhaps she could do it even now.

"Oh, yes," she answered Allan vaguely. "That's probably what I shall do. But this job is really such an opportunity——"

"Afraid of the open sea, eh?" he taunted.

She was annoyed at his mocking air, as if she did not have the stuff that writers were made of. After all, he must have misgivings about his own ability to sail the open sea or he wouldn't be keeping his advertising job so long. She decided, however, not to return his challenge. She summoned a pale smile.

"I must fly now, really. Perhaps I'll see you again. Good-by."

Allan, she felt, stood looking after her rather

oddly as she hurried down the street. She was glad he had broken up her nightmare. Now the street ahead seemed tranquil, lazily mobile, not at all fearful. Zoe, relieved, ran on to the filing agency.

It was a dull, depressed office, as dull as filing, and Zoe's spirits fell as soon as she had entered. How ghastly to be a file clerk with nothing else to look forward to! She, at least, could look forward to becoming a famous writer some day. She didn't have to clerk forever.

The woman in charge of the agency, plump and overchinned, was not encouraging.

"Our clients usually insist on a diploma from the Filing School as well as experience," she said, looking over Zoe disapprovingly, "and you say you have no letters of recommendation from your last place. The only thing I could offer would be a place at the Novelty Gas Fittings Co. at fifteen dollars a week."

"No," said Zoe sickly, "I couldn't take that. I—perhaps I'll let you know later."

"A dollar deposit, if you wish us to look up something for you," said the woman. "Of course April is always a bad time to hunt work, but we could find something."

"I'll drop in later and register," Zoe said, and flew out. She stumbled blindly down the steps. Fifteen dollars a week was scarcely a salary even for Albon. It was discouraging, too, after one had condescended to consider an inferior posi-

tion, to be rejected as unqualified. What a horrid person that woman was! Zoe was not sure what response she had expected, but she had thought the agency would show surprise that such an obviously clever girl should stoop to a file clerk's position.

"Really, Miss," she had pictured the agency head, considerate and awed, "you will pardon my saying so, but a girl with your education and talent should have an editorial position. I'm afraid filing is far below your capabilities."

"Never mind," Zoe imagined her own cynical response, "I have to eat. I'll take your position."

How horrid that woman had been! Zoe stopped at the foot of the stairs and looked uncertainly down Thirty-first Street. She could go into some office and demand a position. She could—then Allan's words recurred to her. After all, she was getting nowhere tramping around looking for work. Why shouldn't she, so long as she was destined to starve anyway, starve for the sake of art? She would live on bread in a garret like Dariel did, and write mad, beautiful things. She would stay up all night and write plays and novels. She wouldn't even look for a job. Now was her chance to start her dreamed-of future.

Zoe's depression lifted. She felt exalted. She thought of how in centuries to come people would read of her decision right there on Thirty-first Street.

"Think of it," they would say, "the great Zoe Bourne sought a position as a mere file clerk and they rejected her."

"But I don't even have money to advance on a garret," Zoe remembered miserably, "I don't even have a nickel for bread. And I couldn't just leave Mrs. Horne's when I owe her and Fania so much. They would arrest me!"

But she could go home this very moment and start writing. Julie would be away. She would begin with a play and it would be about just such an interesting type as herself. She rushed home, almost forgetting to pity herself for being obliged to walk.

Julie came in from her party with Wagenstein at nearly three o'clock in the morning. She was surprised to find the light in her room still on, and Zoe, fully dressed, bending over her desk. There were papers scattered all about.

"Oh, you did get a job then?" asked Julie, bewilderedly.

Zoe lifted a red, tear-drenched face and shook her head mutely.

Julie picked up a page on which a single line was written—"Cast of Characters." She glanced at another with the same solitary line.

"Then—you're writing a play?"

Zoe nodded and then burst into tears again.

"But oh, Julie, I haven't a thing to say!" she sobbed. "I haven't a thing to say!"

CHAPTER XXIII

ZOE had looked forward with a dull, fascinated anticipation to that evening with Al Schuler. She had not told any one about it and she did not think of it consciously herself. It was something big and bat-like that covered all her thoughts. She wondered a little why she was doing it, how she had the courage. There was, of course, the discouragement and irritating poverty of the last few weeks; not the going without new dresses half so much as the going without annoying, maddening little things, like bus rides, postage stamps, newspapers, the groveling business of borrowing dimes and quarters for subway fares. Those were the things that, heaped up, made blacker despair than any matter of a new dinner gown or going without lunch.

There was an empty, drifting feeling that her disappointment in Cornell had given her. There seemed to be no cause for doing anything, no cause for not doing anything. She would drift with whatever tide came. She had an idea of what might happen if she had dinner with Al Schuler in his suite at the Biltmore. There was really no reason for her going. But then there was no reason for her not going. And at least it would mean that something was happening

in her life, something to distract her from her feeling of utter futility.

Zoe felt no excitement as she dressed to go. Julie was out with Wagenstein and she looked reflectively at her wardrobe. Julie's costumes were more suited to the occasion than her own simple, tailored things. Sleek, black things, lacy, delicate things—that was the sort of stuff to wear. There was no use, though, in trying on Julie's things. They were all too large except her hats. She would wear that little black hat with the feathers dipping down on the side and splashing against her cheek.

She regretfully put on her blue velvet dress. It was very smartly cut, but the starched white collar and cuffs gave it a look of boyishness and severity that Zoe felt was incongruous with the occasion. It should—oh, certainly it should have been black, clinging satin, with a flash of jet over white shoulders.

Six-thirty. He was sending his own limousine for her at seven. She should have a billowy velvet and ermine evening wrap to throw over that slinky black costume of her imaginings; to lean softly back among the cushions of his limousine and feel silkily, fragrantly content. Instead Zoe ruefully drew on her new coat—very modish, but with a suggestion of tailored swagger which was not in harmony with the evening. She laid it on her bed and went into Maisie's room to look in Maisie's better illumined mirror.

Maisie was out. As usual she had left her stockings soaking in the lavatory bowl and her office dress in a collapsed little ring on the floor, just as she had stepped out of it.

Maisie's mirror had a light which Julie discovered was the only one in the house which would reveal how successful one's make-up would be under the handicap of brilliant artificial light or daylight. Now Zoe saw that she could use a lipstick to advantage. More rouge, too. Funny how foolishly immature she looked. She had a ridiculous notion that Schuler would say, "My dear child, you'll never do at all. You're simply not suited to the part. That's all." She should be lusciously curved and womanly looking for tonight. It was annoying to look like a fresh, wholesome young athlete instead of a sophisticated woman of the world. Clematia called her name from the hall and with another dab of rouge Zoe went down.

In front of the house was a long green limousine, upholstered in gray velvet. A chauffeur in green livery opened the door for her. Zoe experienced the sad happiness that comes to people who are doing something which appears to be very magnificent, but which they know to be empty and meaningless. The world did not care what became of her; therefore, why should she? There was no one on earth who would be concerned if she were to become Al Schuler's mistress.

"I'm trying to tempt myself. I really don't feel in the least tempted," Zoe thought, as she was borne luxuriously along in the car. She looked at the chauffeur's square green back. Think of having a chauffeur at your disposal. One would have to bear the advances of an old fool like Schuler, though, in return. Still, there would be something martyrlike in that which a woman could really enjoy. It was much more appealing to be discontented in jewels and furs than to be cheery and brave in calico. Women enjoyed it much more. Zoe rather thought she would—Julie would be surprised when she found out.

The car was sliding to the curb before the hotel and Zoe got out. She went into the side entrance and walked around to the desk to send up her name to Schuler. Her feet seemed to belong to some one else. This was not Zoe Bourne, surely, who was walking through the hotel lobby preparatory to meeting an elderly roué in his chambers. This was not the Zoe Bourne who had washed dishes in a dingy, gas-lit kitchen in Albon. This was not the Zoe Bourne who had sought happiness in Bill Cornell's arms. This was a motion picture, perhaps, and she was only seeing herself as the heroine. One does that.

The sound of her voice asking for Schuler frightened her. It was Zoe Bourne's voice. Why had she no feeling, beyond a detached curiosity

about the whole thing. She walked, trance-like, to the elevator. There was no reason for her to go up. She did not want to dine with Al Schuler. She could go back right now, if she chose. It seemed outrageous that one should yield to temptation without even being tempted.

His room. She stopped. There was nothing to prevent her from turning around now and going home. Zoe raised her hand and knocked. The door opened and Schuler pulled her gayly in. His few gray hairs were combed back smoothly and his pink face bore the evidence of a recent massage. He wore a brocaded silk dressing gown of vivid blue, which Zoe admitted was handsome enough.

This was his living room and it was sumptuous in rich, dark, mature furnishings. In front of the large window a table was laid for two and the glint of silver and glass was alluring. A huge bowl of red roses was in the window and on the table a corsage of violets lay at her plate. It was plain that Schuler believed that beauty was the best payment for beauty. That this was no ordinary dinner engagement with an ordinary little ingénue was evident from his manner in which there was a subtle air of suppressed excitement.

This surely was not Schuler, the great theatrical manager, for whose smile a thousand girls would sell their souls. Zoe was disappointed. She was not even excited. It was as if she were

watching the affair from some point of vantage instead of actually taking a leading part in it. It was a cursed literary sense of course. Seizing every thrill and tearing it to bits to see what composed it.

Schuler was not playing up to the rôle of seducer, either. He was nothing but an old gourmet, who ate and drank with elderly enjoyment, and used women for his dessert. If he could only stay fixed in her mind as the great Al Schuler, then Zoe felt she might be equal to the occasion. But he persisted in appearing to her merely as an old man who was becoming increasingly ridiculous by his servile flattery and sugary compliments.

It was odd what one did without having any feeling about it one way or the other. You always thought of girls making a vast decision to go straight or to go wrong, and then following out their decision conscientiously, with earnestness in the first case and reckless defiance in the latter. Whereas, it was probably true that they didn't have any thought about it one way or the other. The moment just came when things seemed unimportant. Yet Zoe confessed that she would prefer to have felt a mighty temptation. If it had been Cornell at one time, for instance. Suddenly she closed her eyes and thought of Christopher Kane. His gray, whimsical eyes.

The waiter came in and removed the dishes

when they had finished the dinner. He folded up the little table. He put the chair in place. He pushed back the table. Zoe watched him, waiting. Schuler watched him, waiting. They both knew that the moment they were alone he would kiss her. The door finally closed on the waiter.

"Now, I want you to tell me how you started out in the theatrical business," said Zoe, breathlessly.

Schuler, who had gotten up from his chair as the door closed, sat down again, taken aback.

Zoe, seated in the chair opposite him, lit one of the cigarettes he had had sent up. Schuler looked at her hungrily and then gave a little laugh.

"The history of my life, my dear, eh?" he said, and Zoe was relieved to see him look away from her ankles.

"I've heard it is fascinating," she added.

"Well, there's not much to tell," Schuler began, lighting a cigar and crossing his legs. "I came here—let me see—June of 1878. Before your time, eh? Born up in Vermont. I didn't have but three quarters and a dime when I got here. I . . . I . . . I . . . I . . . I . . . I . . . I . . . I . . . I . . . I . . . I . . . I"

Zoe remembered the girls talking over men that night in her room and the advice to keep your eyes interested while your man was telling the story of his life stuck in her head. She was

idly wondering just how many hundreds of I's it would take for Schuler to tell his story and just what would happen then. It was not pleasant to be gobbled up for dessert. He might have the decency to try to get acquainted first. Here was an old roué who invites a girl to dinner with fairly obvious intentions and then—Zoe shook herself. Was there no escape from this habit of analyzing situations? Couldn't she consider herself part of the picture instead of a detached observer? Was there no feeling strong and powerful enough to sweep aside this abominable literary impulse?

She nodded her head, and interspersed Schuler's story with a suitable number of "Not reallys" and "Imagine!s" to show how intensely interested she was. But he did finish after a time and Zoe, with a mental shrug, saw him get up and move softly toward her. He put his hands on her shoulders.

"And now I am going to hear all about my honey girl?"

Zoe giggled unrestrainedly. Schuler's pink face was close to hers and she identified the brand of his massage cream. She traced the design of an octopus in the pattern of his dressing gown. That, too, made her smile.

Schuler's hand under her chin made her conscious of herself. What did one do, then? Wasn't it the thing to spring up and throw off his vile touch with a scorching rebuke? But Zoe

did not move. She did turn swiftly as he bent down to kiss her.

"I'll look after you, Girlie," whispered Schuler, thickly, his hand clutching her arm. "You can have a nicer place than this, Honey, a car. I'll settle some stock on you, too, the minute you say the word. I won't bother you any. Just be my little pal. Just a little pal."

Zoe did not even feel his lips that time when he kissed her. It landed somewhere at the nape of her neck where her bobbed hair curled in. It was ludicrous for this old man to be courting the favor of a girl like herself. Julie would be different, because Julie was thoroughly feminine and sophisticated. Herself—well, she was not the type.

"Different from the run of 'em," he whispered, leaning over her chair and keeping his hands on her arms. "Real stuff, this time. Nothing phony about you, is there, Sweet? Like your eyes. I'll tell you what. We'll just call up your little roommate and tell her you've met a friend and may not be home."

Zoe awakened suddenly. She saw herself in a mirror on the wall—trim, fresh, buoyant—contrasting with Schuler's fishy-eyed flabbiness. Her starched white cuffs and collar were out of place. She didn't belong here. She simply wasn't the type for the part. If she had owned a sleek black dress with jet on it—— But even then her shoulders were not the décolleté type.

No, she simply could not be erotic in such sensible clothes. It was inconsistent, and utterly impossible, just as it would be impossible to be sensible in erotic clothes.

"What did you say, dear?" asked Schuler, dotingly.

Zoe rose, pushing him gently aside.

"I'm sorry, I——"

"You have a headache," he exclaimed solicitously. "It was the wine."

"No," said Zoe, idiotically, "it's this Buster Brown collar. It doesn't belong, you see. I'm afraid I——"

It was becoming difficult to explain in the face of Schuler's ominous, fishy eyes. His voice was sympathetic enough, but his eyes were cold. He had paid for dinner and he wanted his desert. Zoe stammered a little confusedly.

"If I—I—if I had a little whiskey, perhaps——"

She had seen him go into the adjoining bedroom before to get the liquor and now, as she saw him vanish in there again, murmuring protestations of sympathy for her headache, she snatched her hat and cloak from the chair beside her and moved, catlike, her heart in her mouth, to the outer door. If it were locked! She heard the tinkle of ice in a glass at the moment her hand was on the knob. She turned it noiselessly, thank heaven, it didn't squeak, and was out in the hall. At a turn in the hall two doors away

was the staircase. She fairly flew down. He might look down there, though. Frantically she stepped into a partially opened door. She did not even apologize to the old man in shawls, seated in an invalid's chair, for bursting into his room. Would Schuler follow her? Even as she wondered, Zoe heard footsteps hurrying down the staircase she had just left. The steps went on down.

Zoe rushed to the elevator and caught it on the instant. She was flushed and dying to laugh with the absurdity of this chase. Schuler, of course, felt insulted and outraged. He would not see anything funny in it.

She was on the ground floor now, and walked quietly out into the street. She wanted to shriek with laughter. She wanted to run breathlessly all the way home. But she walked demurely along in the shadow of the buildings until she reached Fifth Avenue. She took the first bus that came along. She could transfer at Fifty-seventh Street anyway.

The bus was crowded. Zoe wanted to shriek to them, "Look, people, look! I have just run away from adventure. I have just escaped seduction. Isn't life gorgeous? Isn't life funny?"

But she did not. She wondered just what Al Schuler was doing now. She rather suspected that he had simply called up some other lady, one who didn't wear Buster Brown collars.

Meantime she changed to a Riverside bus and sat up on top with a fat matron who took up all the seat. She was amazed at herself for not thrilling, in memory, at her adventure. Instead she found herself speculating whether Mrs. Horne had discovered Maisie's unlawful laundering in the wash bowl and had confiscated the stockings as she had threatened. Zoe rather thought she had.

CHAPTER XXIV

ZOE had been avoiding Mrs. Horne assiduously for the last few weeks. She had waited until Mrs. Horne had left the dining room before she went into dinner every night, at the risk of incurring Clematia's everlasting contempt. When she passed the formal drawing room on the first floor on her way out, she never dared turn lest Mrs. Horne should be sitting there, making out her endless bills, the smile glazed on her face in case any one should catch her unawares. At first Zoe had explained to Mrs. Horne and assured her that she would pay her for certain within the next two weeks. But when the weeks rolled by and her daily search for a job seemed more and more fruitless, she had quit explaining. With Fania, it was different. She dared not avoid her, but it was tiresome and embarrassing for both of them to be everlastingly apologizing for her bad luck.

"I suppose the store has been nasty to her, too," Zoe reflected. "Won't let her charge anything more, and all because she was so decent to me about letting me mess up her credit."

There was one faint prospect of a job, but Zoe was afraid to count much on it. That was the *Vanity Box*, a smart weekly journal dealing with society and the arts and town gossip. Kane

had once spoken of it to her as a clever magazine and said the editor was an old friend of his. Zoe, in fine-combing all her prospects, had remembered this and had called to see about getting a position on the staff. The editor was a gray-haired, charming cosmopolite, well on in the fifties. He was just about to go to lunch as Zoe was announced. He stood at his desk, hat in his hand, as she hesitantly approached him, but as soon as she announced the cause of her call and prepared to justify her lack of qualifications, he interrupted her:

"Ah, yes, I see. Well, why not lunch with me, my dear, and talk it all over?"

They had gone to the Russian Inn and here, when Zoe attempted to "talk it over," her remarkable host delicately but firmly changed the subject to a certain play which Zoe had fortunately seen, but whose bearing on her editorial ability was rather hard to detect. And when the play was exhausted, Mr. Bellaire deftly turned the talk to Russian food and the merits of Russian cigarettes and kvas and a dozen other things, so that, when he suddenly glanced at his watch after consuming a beautiful Russian fruit-cake, he decided that the interview was at an end.

"I'm afraid I must rush right off. Mr. Marquis was to see me at two and discuss a series he is planning for us."

Zoe gulped down the last morsel of her dessert and said, disappointedly:

"Oh, but Mr. Bellaire, you see——"

"Charming interview, my dear. Thank you so much. I must tell Kane about it. Good day, Miss Bourne."

Zoe disconsolately reviewed the affair for several days afterward and berated herself for having been so distracted from her purpose. Why, she hadn't been able to say a thing about what she had done or could do, or wanted to do. She doubted if he had even taken down her name. Yet, the fact that he had liked her personally enough to take her to lunch was so much more encouragement than she had had before that Zoe hoped for something quite preposterously nice to result.

She was tiptoeing past Mrs. Horne's drawing room one afternoon a short time after her lunch with Mr. Bellaire, when she heard Mrs. Horne's artificially sweet voice call her. Her heart stood still. Now it had come. Mrs. Horne, with the note of steel which sometimes crept into her saccharine voice, would inform her that, while it almost broke her heart to be practical, still when some one could not pay her board for six weeks—— Dear Miss Bourne would understand, of course.

Zoe turned slowly and went into the drawing room and up to where Mrs. Horne sat, apparently absorbed in her accounts.

She would be put out, of course. She didn't know where she could get a room without paying

in advance. Even at the Young Women's Christian Association—which some of the girls said was quite as grasping as any hotel—she would have to pay in advance. She would even have to borrow the carfare from Julie to get anywhere, without considering the board at all.

Mrs. Horne turned with her fixed little smile and gave Zoe's hand a playful little pat.

"Ah, yes, there you are, my dear. I haven't seen much of you lately, have I?"

"No, you see——" began Zoe, miserably.

But Mrs. Horne struck brightly in.

"Having a hard time of it, aren't you, being out of work so long? As I've always said, nothing just wrings my heart—just wrings it, you know—like seeing one of my girls in trouble. I was telling Miss Tait the other night at dinner—you know she's got such a lovely position now over at the St. Agnes Branch of the Library—I was saying that the girls are really just like my daughters. Of course Miss Tait is a little too old to be my daughter——" here Mrs. Horne laughed merrily and Zoe joined feebly in.

"Yes, she's a little too old to be your daughter," she contributed, wanly.

Mrs. Horne took up the point, zestfully.

"Yes, there has to be an age limit. Ha, ha! But Miss Tait is such a dear, really. Of course in her funny clothes the girls do make fun of her, and, after all, you can't blame them."

"No," Zoe wrung out,

"And she's been here off and on for such a long time," went on Mrs. Horne. "Yes, Miss Tait, as I told her myself, is one of my old stand-bys. Of course, there's Julie. You like her very well, don't you?"

"Oh, Julie's wonderful," Zoe agreed, sitting tensely on the edge of the magnificent davenport and wishing that, if Mrs. Horne were going to put her out, she would get to it quickly.

"So popular with the men, too. I often wonder why so few of my girls ever marry. They're so attractive and all. Miss Fairborn—you wouldn't remember her, of course. She was here two years ago and then went to Rome to study architecture or something. Miss Fairborn used to say—I think she was joking, because I don't think she meant to be mean—one often does that, you know—say something that sounds disagreeable if you take it in one way and perfectly all right if you take it in another."

"Yes," Zoe assented. Was there ever such a woman? Here she had her victim before her, ready for the slaughter, but first she must torture her with a long lecture on how much she loved the girls and how wrapped up she was in their joys and sorrows and, in short, how foolishly fond of them she was to the great detriment of her bank account. And what did it matter what Miss Fairborn said anyway.

"I think so, too," pursued Mrs. Horne. "Let me see, where was I? Oh, yes, Miss Fairborn—

too bad you never met her. You two would have hit it off beautifully. She was so fair and you're so dark. Full of spirit, too, although, to tell the truth, I guess she was nearer forty than anybody ever suspected. She said the girls thought so much of themselves that they couldn't stand the thought of sacrificing their individuality to anybody—not even a man. But I think she meant it in a perfectly good way.”

“Of course,” perfunctorily agreed Zoe. At least, what Miss Fairborn said was out of the way.

Mrs. Horne fixed her eyes on Zoe for a moment.

“It just came to me that you probably owe the girls in the house, as well as myself, a lot of money. I remember you never got an allowance from home or anything. Your salary was all you had?”

“Yes,” admitted Zoe. Oh, for the courage to tell a beautiful lie about an expected inheritance or some private income. But you couldn't lie with Mrs. Horne's beady eyes pinning you down like that.

“I don't like the girls to owe one another,” Mrs. Horne's voice had an edge of irritation now. “Somebody always moves and then I'm held responsible. Why, goodness knows. But much as I love my girls, I will say that they are the most unreasonable in a business way. You owe Fania Tell well up toward a hundred and

fifty, don't you? I saw the bill. You left it on your breakfast tray the other morning, and I knew you used her account."

Zoe was becoming indignant. It was really none of Mrs. Horne's business if she did owe other people, and, if she just wanted to pile up all these things to give her an excuse for putting her out, she could stop right away. She'd go. She wouldn't make any fuss. Only it was annoying to have Mrs. Horne act like such an old hypocrite about it.

"I must apologize for looking at it, but you never can tell," went on Mrs. Horne's hard, bright voice. "One day Olive Tanhill—have you met her husband?—old, of course, but very nice and so fond of dear Olive! One day she left a perfectly good check for five hundred dollars on her tray and fortunately Clematia was honest enough to return it, but for several hours Olive was on pins and needles. Since then, I always make it a practice to look over the things the girls leave around, because you never can tell what they'll leave. And I do hate to have them lose anything. Mrs. Shaw tells me I ought to just let them learn a lesson now and then. Mrs. Shaw says I'm all heart, where the girls are concerned. And, of course, as I've often told the girls, I barely make enough on the place to buy clothes for my back."

"Yes," said Zoe, ironically.

It was coming now. Conversation was hover-

ing around profit and loss, and the blow was about to fall. Well, Mrs. Horne could have saved all that conversation. It was perfectly plain what she was getting at in her first sentence.

"And I've been so interested in your work, my dear, and so disappointed when you found—ah—it didn't suit you, although I understand from the girls that there was a little trouble about it. Well, you needn't tell me, of course. And you've been looking so pale lately, and I do hate to have the girls worry. Really, Mrs. Shaw says it worries me more to have them worry than it does them. I'm so sympathetic. And I knew it must be financial—but of course one has to look after one's own interests——"

"Mrs. Horne," Zoe put in desperately, "you needn't beat around the bush. I know you want to put me out, and I'm perfectly willing to go. I——"

"Put you out?" cried Mrs. Horne. "What ever put such an idea in your head? I'm simply asking you if you want the loan of two hundred and fifty dollars until you get on your feet?"

Zoe wondered afterward why she hadn't fainted completely away when she heard this. She did sit for an instant with her mouth agape, staring at Mrs. Horne until that lady rather impatiently tapped her check book and said:

"Well, will two hundred and fifty see you through? You can pay me just when you see fit,

you know. A small amount now and then. It will settle Fania. If you need more——”

“No—oh, no——” gasped Zoe. “But it’s too good of you. I ought not to let you do it.”

“Nonsense,” said Mrs. Horne, proceeding to write the check. “Let me see, is there a ‘u’—oh, yes—B-o—u——”

After all there is nothing like money to re-establish one’s self-confidence. After Zoe had divided Mrs. Horne’s loan among her creditors, she began to feel that there was really no reason at all why she should not approach Mr. Bellaire again on the subject of a position on the *Vanity Box* staff. It had been nearly a week now since their luncheon and something definite might have developed in that time.

Zoe went down to the exquisitely furnished little suite of offices which the *Vanity Box* had on Fifth Avenue and sat in a velvet-hung, black and mauve reception room while a sleek, well dressed office girl took her name in to Mr. Bellaire. After a moment the glass-paneled door of his office opened gently and the girl beckoned to her.

“How good of you to call again, my dear!” Mr. Bellaire greeted her warmly, putting his gold-rimmed spectacles in a monogrammed case and motioning her to a chair beside his desk. He pushed aside some proof which he was glancing over and proceeded to give smiling attention to his caller.

"I thought you might have something for me to do this time," said Zoe, at once.

"Certainly, my dear—of course," said Mr. Bellaire, briskly. He took down a small packet of notes from a pigeonhole and, removing the rubber band, spread them before Zoe. "Here are some scraps of talk about certain débutantes and actresses, and exhibitions and that sort of thing—intimate little bits, you know, which I want written up in a vivacious, sophisticated way. Not malicious or scandalous, understand. Just intimate and agreeable in tone, with a suggestion of the afternoon tea chatter about it. Continental dash about it, too. Can you do it by day after tomorrow—Wednesday?"

"Oh, yes," said Zoe, eagerly. She glanced at the notes. "You mean—you mean you're taking me on the staff?"

Mr. Bellaire stared humorously at her.

"Of course, of course, my dear. Didn't I mention it when we lunched together? Ah, yes, I remember. I had to dash off to see Don Marquis about that series—very adroit they are, too, by the way. I want you to see them."

"I'm so glad," said Zoe, happily. "And about hours, Mr. Bellaire, and salary?"

Mr. Bellaire waved his long, tapering hand as if to brush away such a sordid thought as mere money.

"Come in when you like and go when you like. Perhaps we can talk things over more fully

later on in regard to your work. I want this sort of thing done every week. It will run a full page with some attractive little silhouettes by way of illustration. We'll call this department 'Five o'clock' or something like that. Salary? I imagine—hm—fifty dollars a week is the usual thing, I believe. Later on we'll make it more, naturally."

Zoe blinked. Fifty dollars a week. Why, it was enormous. She could pay Mrs. Horne back in less than three months, probably. Wouldn't Christopher Kane be pleased when she told him? Wouldn't it be fun talking it over with him?

"By the bye, our mutual friend, Christopher Kane, will be in town tomorrow," said Mr. Bellaire, once more putting on his spectacles by way of dismissing Zoe. "Tomorrow morning, I believe he said in his wire. I was beginning to fear he wouldn't get here in time to sail on the *Berengaria*, after I have been rushing around for the last week arranging his passage and all——"

"Is—is Mr. Kane going abroad?" asked Zoe, bewilderedly.

"Sailing Friday," said Mr. Bellaire, calmly. "He has made a permanent London connection, you know. Very good thing, too, I understand. Leaves a large part of his time free to write those fantastic stories of his. Until tomorrow, then, Miss Bourne."

He waved her out, politely but unmistakably,

and Zoe was obliged to ask the girl in the reception room just where her desk was to be and other important things which Mr. Bellaire had so blandly ignored. As she went home, though, she was thinking about Kane and what Mr. Bellaire had said. She was a little hurt that Kane had not written of his plans to her. It was as if he did not consider her close enough to be informed of his personal affairs.

Zoe was disappointed, too, to think that he was leaving just as she was starting on this new and entertaining work. It would have been so pleasant to talk it over with him and discuss ways of using it as a wedge to the editorship of a more important magazine. He would be proud of her, if he knew she was to review art exhibitions and concerts even in a desultory way. He would feel that she was making use of the things he had taught her. She remembered, regretfully, of the plans they had made, in a casual way, of course, for this coming year. He had said something vaguely about getting season tickets for the Metropolitan and for the Theater Guild. It would have been a glorious year. And then here he was running off to England.

Crossing Forty-second Street, Zoe ran into Bill Cornell and Allan Myers. Allan had spoken before Zoe realized that Bill was with him.

"This is great. I was afraid we should never see you again," exclaimed Bill, shaking her hand vigorously and taking in Zoe's prosperous look-

ing costume with an approving eye. Zoe gathered from his manner that, for some absurd reason, he didn't want Allan to know he had any connection with her except their former office friendship. "Actually, we lost that cold cream account after you left. Doesn't that make you gloat?"

"I'm delighted to hear it," laughed Zoe. And then, because she wanted to tell somebody about her good luck, she told them about the *Vanity Box* position, and Allan's eyebrows went up. Zoe looked away quickly, lest she read more of the faint disdain in his eyes. Why should she starve herself in an attic when she could write pleasantly and profitably, if less artistically, on the *Vanity Box*? He needn't look as if she'd sold her birthright.

"Congratulations!" Bill said, very plainly impressed. He held on to her hand for an instant and Zoe was surprised that there was not the slightest thrill in the touch of his hand. It was a big, comfortable hand—that was all—and she wondered how that little electric bond between two people could be destroyed by a simple process of reasoning.

"Crazy to see you—very soon," Bill said, in a low tone. Zoe merely smiled, impenetrably.

She went on, after Bill's handshake, feeling as Julie had confessed to feeling after an affair had gone cold—flat and vapid. She was disappointed with herself, too. She, who had

prided herself on being capable of great love, had loved lightly and then let it slide unheeded, out of her life. No matter if Bill were just blatantly physical, she should have loved so deeply that she would not have seen his imperfections. If he had not returned her love, she would have had the glorious experience of unrequited love and gone on loving till she died. That was the sort of person she imagined herself to be. And yet she was just like Julie and the rest of the girls—shallow and fickle, unable to stay in love with one man for the silly reason that he was so *normal*.

Still, any woman with a mind could not stay in love with a man who was nothing more than a handsome animal—not for a long time, at least. She couldn't, for instance, marry him, and she couldn't be splendid friends with him, as it was possible to be with a man like Kane. Of course, Zoe admitted, she would stay in love so long as there was that electric bond between them, no matter what his intellect might be. But the paradox of the thing was that without an intellectual *rapproch* the thrill could not exist. A kiss from Cornell now would be nothing more than a healthy, cousinly affair.

Zoe sighed and then remembered the *Vanity Box* and what the future held. She smiled confidently. She was through with men. At last she was secure of her future. She was perfectly capable of making her own happiness, inde-

pendent of men. It didn't matter whether any one loved her or not. The important thing was to have a good job, and enjoy the nice things of life the way Julie did.

She would tell Christopher Kane all about her new philosophy when she saw him tomorrow, as she surely would. It was really too bad he was going away now that she had begun to like him so much.

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CHAPTER XXV

KANE did not look her up the next day or the next, to Zoe's intense disappointment, absorbed though she was in the details of her new job. She knew that Mr. Bellaire was to see him that night at his hotel and she was a little aggrieved that he had not sought her out before any one else.

"I'm going to work frightfully hard this year. There isn't anything else for me to do, now that Bill doesn't interest me any more and Christopher Kane is leaving," she said, as she lounged on Julie's bed that evening, while Julie and Fania engaged themselves in the rejuvenation of Julie's old evening gown.

"You'll find somebody else," said Julie, painstakingly sewing on a metal shoulder-strap. "You'll probably meet all sorts of new men down at the *Vanity Box*. You know, Fania, Zoe's going to save up and go to Paris with me. Fleurice has postponed it till August now, so Zoe has plenty of time to collect the fare."

"Don't be too sure," said Zoe, lazily.

"Of course you're coming," Julie went on, unperturbed. "You ought to come, too, Fania. Of course I suppose you'd want to bring Ralph along——"

"Fania had better stay here and marry Ralph," recommended Zoe. "That's what fiancés are for."

Fania frowned at the mention of Ralph.

"I'd go abroad if I had the money. I'd like to see what Ralph would do if I actually went. I'm positive the dear boy would not rush the wedding to keep me from going."

"You're a little fool, Fania," declared Julie. "Don't you think so, Zoe? Here she is, engaged to a man for eight years and the wedding day is just as far away as it ever was. He knows he's got you, Fania. He knows you'll be right here just as long as he wants you to be, and after he's got through having a good time."

"He isn't having a good time," protested Fania. "I know he's extravagant—that is, for anybody who says he can't afford to get married yet. But—but he's not altogether to blame. At least, he wanted to get married right away when we were first engaged. But I wanted to come to New York and have a career, for a little while, so I kept putting things off until he got so he never mentioned getting married at all. The last year or so I put in a hint occasionally when I feel a little blue, you know, but he never bites. Just says, 'No use trying to marry on less than \$7,500.'"

"Well, I'd leave him cold, Fania," Julie said, indignantly. "After he's got through having a nice bachelor time, he'll come around and say

it's time for the wedding. Only you'll be about forty by that time and he'll be no richer than he was in the first place. By then you'll have turned down a lot of good chances like this MacNair person."

"Harry MacNair wanted to marry me right off," said Fania, thoughtfully. "I was surprised. You remember when I met him—that day I went into the importing department to sketch some hats. Why, it hasn't been more than five weeks ago."

"Like him, Fania?" Zoe questioned, interestedly.

"Oh, Harry's all right. But why should I marry any one yet? I have a feeling that something perfectly wonderful is going to happen in my art. Being in a department store is just a stop-gap. I expect to do big things—and very soon. So why should I pass up these wonderful opportunities in my career and marry? Oh, I suppose if I packed up and went to Ralph, he'd marry me all right. But marriage is such an admission of defeat."

"Which opportunities are you referring to, Fania?" Julie asked, with a hint of delicate malice in her voice.

Fania reddened.

"Maybe I haven't had any yet, but there's likely to be something around the corner."

"Unless it's a round corner," said Julie, "in which case you're probably turning all the time

without knowing it, and without finding any big opportunities, either."

"What do you really want most of all to do, Fania?" Zoe asked.

"Why—er—to be an artist," said Fania, disconcerted. "Paint landscapes and—er—well, the usual thing."

Having a faint doubt as to Fania's artistic abilities, Zoe said nothing. Fania turned to her sharply.

"How about you, Zoe? What do you intend to do the rest of your life? Stay on the *Vanity Box*?"

It was Zoe's turn to be disconcerted. After all, what was the thing she wanted most in the world to do? What was her goal? She certainly wasn't getting any nearer to being a playwright by going on the *Vanity Box*. She liked the *Vanity Box*, and perhaps she might work up to Mr. Bellaire's position in twenty years, but the acquiring of an agreeable position was not a goal. One ought to plan to achieve. Bringing up children was an achievement, but of course that was not to be in her scheme of things. Writing a great play was an achievement, too. But in her heart Zoe knew she would never write a great play.

"I don't know. I thought I wanted to write plays, but I don't seem to be doing it. And I don't suppose I'll be any nearer to it in ten years than I am now," she answered gloomily. "Any-

way, we're all of us too mediocre to do anything. Anything really big, I mean. We just putter along trying to make steel skyscrapers out of a bunch of pasteboard blocks and a toy shovel. Inclination isn't genius."

"What's the difference?" yawned Julie. "We have a lot of fun out of our blocks and our toy tools. We'd probably get the backache if we did try to do anything big."

"I want to, though. I still want to," said Zoe, wistfully. "I want to burn myself out doing something tremendous. But I never will. I'll drone along just like everybody else. Of course I like being on the *Vanity Box*, but that isn't the sort of thing one plans for a future."

"The only thing the matter with you, Zoe, is that you're in love," said Julie, dismissing the subject of futile careers. "It always makes you so pessimistic."

Zoe sniffed scornfully.

"That's all off, thank you."

"With Bill, certainly," said Julie, "but it's Kane now. It probably has been all along only you've been so set on your handsome Cornell. I don't see why you didn't hang on to him, anyway, but that's your own affair."

"You really think I'm in love with Christopher Kane?" demanded Zoe in astonishment.

"Certainly." Julie's assurance was very disagreeable. "That is why you're so sour on the subject of careers and futures. It makes you

cross to feel dependent on some one else for your happiness instead of being able to go and get it by yourself. It makes you realize how puny you are. I know."

Zoe studied her hands a little bewilderedly. Of course she was not in love with Christopher Kane. She liked him and she admired his mind and his character tremendously. She was perfectly sure that some day he would be great. She loved to be with him, too, and it was curious the way she had missed him all those weeks he had been away. But that was not love. Love was more agonizing—the way, for instance, that she had once felt about Bill Cornell. To be sure, that had not lasted more than a few months, but it did bear more resemblance to the real passion than her feeling about Kane. Why Kane—in the first place he had always sedulously avoided any relation of that sort between them. Perhaps if he truly loved some one he would be more impetuous.

Thinking about Kane, Zoe recreated his image in her mind. She had wanted to see him again. Perhaps he would sail without even saying good-by to her. No, he would not do that. She could not imagine him doing anything that might hurt her feelings. She looked up. Fania had left the room.

"A little miffed at the way we jibed at her opportunities," Julie explained in a whisper. "She thinks that while it's perfectly natural that

we should feel discouraged about *our* futures, hers is a different matter."

Maisie opened the door at that moment.

"Do you like the new job?" she asked, sitting down beside Zoe. "The *Vanity Box*, I mean."

Zoe started to answer and then Maisie suddenly remembered what had brought her in.

"The boy downstairs told me to give you this note. I almost forgot."

Zoe tore open the envelope and read:

"*Dear Little Zoe:*

"I sail Friday. Can't we have tomorrow afternoon together? The Biltmore at one, if you can come.

"C."

Zoe jumped up and snatched her hat and coat from the closet and dashed out.

"Where are you going, Zoe?" called Julie.

"Just walking up the Drive for a few minutes," murmured Zoe. She ran down stairs and out to the street. It was a cold night for April, and a chill wind came up from the river, but Zoe strode warmly along, her coat half open and her hands ungloved. The stars shone frostily and the tugs on the river sent little unwinking gleams across the water. Zoe walked swiftly, almost running, and she felt glowingly content.

"Dear little Zoe," he had said, "Dear little Zoe."

CHAPTER XXVI

ZOE met Kane at one. She was startled at the leap in her heart when her eyes caught sight of his tall, familiar figure in the crowd. He came toward her buoyantly, and at the gladness in his keen gray eyes Zoe gave a little contented sigh. She clung to his hand for a minute, speechless with sudden pleasure at his nearness. They drifted through lunch and then wandered out through the Grand Central Station.

"You knew about—about—you knew that I am free?"

Zoe nodded, a little embarrassed.

"It means a great deal to me," Kane said gravely. "I was beginning to fear the thing could never be arranged, in spite of the fact that our differences were perfectly plain to both of us. However, that chapter is closed now."

He talked of his new work and of his hopes of London.

"It isn't advertising," he said, "and I'm glad. Advertising was stimulating for a while. It's always gratifying to an essentially literary man to find that he can handle a commercial job as well as a born business man. But it palls after a while. Representing this magazine in London, on the contrary, will put new zest in things. There will be the thrill of London, in the first

place—old coffee houses, gloomy book-shops. Of course I have very few friends there.”

“You will write to me occasionally?” asked Zoe.

“Of course,” said Kane quickly.

They had aimlessly wandered into the station and Zoe looked about at the hurrying crowds of people and the porters laden with luggage.

“Let’s go somewhere,” she suggested.

“Wonderful idea,” approved Kane. “Isn’t it strange how a station can inspire you with such terrific wanderlust?”

He took a place in line at a little window and Zoe tugged his arm.

“Where to?” she whispered.

Kane studied the bulletin board.

“Does it matter? Irvington, Hastings, Grey-stone. Let’s go to Tarrytown.”

The train for Westchester County left almost immediately and they were on it before Zoe thought with compunction that after all it was Kane’s last day and he might want to finish up his packing.

“Everything packed,” Kane assured her. “Had it packed before I went West and have had no occasion to touch the trunk since. Besides I want to take another look at Sleepy Hollow. I may take root in London, you know, and never see the place again. And I’ve always wanted to walk up there with you. You’d like it.”

The train slid out of the Grand Central and glided through upper Manhattan and through the country. Kane and Zoe sat quite silent, as if merely being in each other's company was too perfect a condition to be marred by speech. Zoe had a sensation of sliding over a delightful precipice. She tried to collect her reasoning faculties and remind herself that this was only a casual excursion with a casual friend—but it was no use. She was too breathlessly happy to think of it as anything less than a stupendous adventure. They passed the series of delectable little musty villages leading to Tarrytown, as quaintly complete as if no great skyscrapers had ever cast their shadows near.

"Can you believe that tomorrow you will be gone?" asked Zoe, presently. "Tomorrow is as far off up here as the moon. I don't think they have any tomorrows—just yesterdays."

At Tarrytown they got out and walked up a sleepy little street and up a hill in the direction of the Hollow. The air was sparkling and fresh. No one was about.

"We can take the old aqueduct road," Kane suggested, "providing, of course, that you aren't wearing high heels. It goes through to Irvington and Dobbs Ferry and two or three of the other little places that belong in this group. Exactly the road to take if you're with the right person."

"And we will take it?" said Zoe slyly.

"At once," answered Kane, unhesitatingly.

Down the shaded, old little road they walked, past houses which had declined from Colonial manors to the veriest tenements, but with the leisurely glamour of age about them. From a queer old place which had been strangely rejuvenated by a cement porch, a little girl ran out and stared at them curiously. Here was an old garden with vines climbing over the trim white picket fence, and roses and larkspur and sweet peas and nasturtium growing in meticulously arranged groups within.

They were the only living persons on the street, and it seemed to Zoe, as they walked, that they would find the true dwellers in the tangled graveyard of Sleepy Hollow. There they stopped for a while, studying the worn old tombstones with their quaint Dutch epitaphs. It was a dream, thought Zoe, that she was here in this ancient Arcady with Christopher Kane. She looked up at him with a puzzled frown.

Kane glanced down at her, interrogatively.

"I was only thinking about you," she said, slowly. "You have so many queer little doors that open into such strange, lovely places. I wish——"

"What, Zoe?" He looked away, half smiling. She finished in a little incoherent rush.

"—that you were going to stay. Only," she added, hastily, "that is impossible, of course—like most wishes."

She was very happy. She had meant to tell him all about the *Vanity Box*, as they picked up the aqueduct trail, but it suddenly seemed unimportant.

Kane was happy, too. He walked along, whistling, thrusting an arm under her elbow on the muddy patches and helping her through turnstiles. Zoe, stealing a glance at him, thought how nice his lean dreamer's face was, with the arresting gray eyes. She was surprised that she had never considered his appearance more. He was good looking in a quiet, aristocratic sort of way. Looks didn't really matter between them, though. With Bill Cornell she had always wished desperately that she were as pretty as Julie, because she knew it was so important to him. But Christopher Kane liked her because she was—well, because she was herself. Zoe took his arm, on an impulse, and then voiced her thoughts.

"Do you mind if—if people—I mean girls—aren't pretty, Christopher?" She felt herself flushing a little as she used his name. It sent a warm, intimate glow through her. Kane poked his cane at a dandelion patch and did not look up as he answered:

"I worship beauty."

"Oh!" Zoe's voice sounded woeful, and Kane, after a surprised glance at her, looked away.

"Which is just another way of saying that

you are beautiful," he added, in so low a tone that Zoe could scarcely believe her ears.

She dared not trust her voice again, lest the pounding of her heart drown it out. He thought she was beautiful! She wasn't, of course. But if he really thought she was, it meant—it must mean—— Zoe's heart sang.

"So old Bellaire is going to let you review for him!" Kane was matter-of-fact again, and Zoe pouted, "I knew you could do it."

"It isn't being a great playwright, though," Zoe said, slowly. "It's just a compromise."

"Do you still want to write—creative stuff, I mean? Is that still your dream?" Kane asked abruptly.

Zoe was silent for a while, considering.

"It's all so muddled," she said, finally. "I do and I don't. It isn't of first importance any more. I don't want to if I have to sacrifice youth and love and life for it."

"I'm disappointed in you, Zoe," Kane told her, half in earnest.

Zoe, trying to keep in step with his swift, easy stride, defended herself breathlessly.

"But don't you think, Christopher——" again that foolish little thrill over a mere name, "that people have a sort of thermometer in them that tells them whether it's worth the price—whether they really have the immortal stuff in them?"

"Perhaps," Kane reluctantly admitted. "Yet, I don't know. Witness our own Christopher

Kane. He has sacrificed much for his problematical genius, and here he is at thirty-two no nearer fame than he was fifteen years ago."

"But I'm sure of your genius," Zoe said vehemently. "Oh, I know you will become great. I know that. It's unmistakable. But something inside me tells me I haven't the stuff worth fighting for. I was destined for something less."

"Or greater—perhaps," Kane said, in a curious tone.

Then he changed the subject.

They walked on, Zoe a little unhappy at the ease with which Kane kept their conversation pleasantly impersonal. She wanted him to talk about himself, his tastes, his plans for London. Perhaps he really didn't like her well enough to confide in her. It was strange that he had never touched her hand or even looked as if he wanted to kiss her. Perhaps she attracted him mentally and not at all physically! Ghastly thought!

"Oh, dear!" Zoe exclaimed aloud.

"What is it?" Kane asked, quickly, and Zoe guiltily began to talk of something else. They walked on to Irvington, Kane agreeably discoursing on books and genius in general and Zoe, rosy and silent, consumed with a shameful wish that Christopher would kiss her before he went away.

A New York train was due in Irvington in a few minutes, and Kane, after a regretful glance at the clock, decided that they dared not wait

for a later one, since he had some affairs to attend to.

They boarded the train, Zoe with a lingering glance backward at the lovely, shadowed road down which they had come.

"The last time!" she told herself with a sense of defeat. "He probably will never come back and I couldn't ever walk there with any one else."

She gulped down tears and sat down—her eyes looking out of the window. Kane was looking thoughtfully out the other window and did not notice Zoe blinking angrily to keep from crying. He was sitting so close to her now, and tomorrow he would be gone forever. She would plunge into the *Vanity Box* work. What a puttering sort of thing it seemed now! Even if she were to write and become famous, what of it? Christopher Kane would be on the other side of the world.

One thing and one thing only was important. It leaped at her and blinded her to everything in the whole world. She wanted Christopher Kane! She wanted Christopher Kane! Tomorrow he would go away and she would die. She couldn't bear it.

"I'll have to," she told herself savagely. "He doesn't want me. I mustn't let him guess. I couldn't have him know when he doesn't care that way."

Kane turned to her as the train hurried on.

"I'm glad we had that little time together before I went," he said, somberly.

Zoe nodded chokily. Ah, if she could only be suave and poised like Julie or Fania or Margot! After Christopher went away perhaps she would learn to control her emotions and be very cool always.

"You will go on and write your plays," he pursued. "You have fire. That's what an artist should have."

"The *Vanity* will keep me busy enough," Zoe said, with a studied brightness. "Things look much different to me now than when I first came to New York. It isn't necessary to be famous, I find. And I have nothing to write about. I just want to live."

"But Zoe, my dear, I want you to go on and have your career, the things you've always dreamed of." Christopher, with blessed absorption, ignored the half-dozen passengers in the coach and turned Zoe's hot face sharply to his.

"Zoe, do you think I'm going away for nothing? I won't have it! You're to work and write and become the great Zoe Bourne—just as you've always dreamed! And nothing is to come in your way. You mustn't let it! Stick to your dreams, Zoe, please. If I could help by staying here, I would, but if I should stay near you——"

Zoe, wide-eyed, stared into Christopher's burning eyes, his suddenly drawn face.

"If you should stay——" she breathed.

"I would steal you for my own selfish dreams," he said, savagely. "I am so abominably selfish—so weak, Zoe, dear—that I couldn't let you work out your own brave little destiny. I want to pick you up and put you in mine. I'm going away before I spoil everything for you. Why, my dear, I can't even hear your voice without wanting to kiss you——"

"Oh," Zoe's voice was weak with wonder, "did you feel that way, too?"

She saw Kane stare incredulously. Then, oblivious of every one, she felt his lips rushing to hers, his hands covering hers.

"Sweetheart——"

CHAPTER XXVII

"BUT, Zoe, how could you tell so soon?" Julie kept insisting. She and Fania and Maisie were collected in Zoe's room that night, ostensibly for the purpose of helping her pack. But the shock of her news seemed to have paralyzed them, for they sat huddled on Julie's bed, watching Zoe work over her trunk.

"Only last night—and dozens of other times when I've teased you, you've declared up and down that you weren't in love with Christopher Kane," Julie went on. "This very morning you denied it. And at six o'clock the same day you come home with a wedding ring——"

"That part was sudden, wasn't it?" laughed Zoe, dumping a drawerful of handkerchiefs into the trunk. "But, don't you see, Julie, I was really fighting this all the time? He always treated me in such a nice, courteous way, that I couldn't think he was in love with me, even when I was depending on him most. It's going to be wonderful having a husband you can be proud of. Even with Bill, I wanted to tell Christopher about him all the time. I was so sure he would understand and explain why I was so infatuated with Bill, even when I was half ashamed of his stupid—oh, his stupid normalcy, if you know what I mean."

"I don't, but let it go," Julie answered.

Zoe, her black hair standing on end in her excitement, and her olive cheeks flushed scarlet, tore from bureau to trunk and from closet to trunk.

"I knew all the time he was mad about you," Maisie said, placidly. She was running tape through all of Zoe's lingerie. "He'd sit at his desk and watch you all the time you'd be talking to Bill Cornell. And every time you'd be working and run your hand through your hair he'd smile. If you'd only asked me about it sooner, dearie, I could have had the thing settled months ago, and saved you all this rush."

"This was exactly the time for it," Zoe retorted. "Before today would have been too soon and after today would have been too late."

"You're lucky that you knew," Julie said, slowly. Her face, under the golden hair, was pale and tired, and when she saw her eyes in the mirror she looked away, for they were old, discontented, cheated eyes. Zoe's marriage seemed to have crystallized her own life and her own future, and it seemed suddenly a shallow, tinkling thing.

"How about your wonderful new job?" Fania inquired. "Just when you're at the very door of things, Zoe. I'm not saying you're making a mistake, but you are clever and it did look as if you were going to have a career."

Zoe gave an impatient little laugh.

"Oh, I'm just like the rest of you. All I want is to be happy. And the instant I was with Christopher today, I knew what my happiness was and I took it. That's all." She struggled to fit a drawer of shoes into her trunk and then went on, "Mr. Bellaire was awfully decent. He wished us luck and I'm to do a monthly foreign letter for him. It will pay back Mrs. Horne, you see, and we'll be quite poor, I suppose."

Fania looked at her wrist watch. It was far after midnight.

"I'm not helping a bit, so maybe I'll run on to bed. It depresses me to see you so happy. Might as well admit it."

"Oh, Fania, I wish you——" Zoe began, impulsively.

"I know," Fania nodded. "You wish I'd follow your lead. Well, who knows?"

She went out on tiptoe lest she waken Mrs. Horne at the other end of the hall. Maisie went on sleepily with her mending of Zoe's scanty wardrobe.

"I don't think this is exactly what you'd call a steamer outfit, Zoe," she observed dryly, "but it will get by providing you're seasick the whole time."

"Maisie!" Zoe protested. "Anyway, what could I do? We have to be aboard the ship before the shops open. And even if I'd had any money I couldn't have found time today. Christopher is going to buy me things in London. He's

going to get me a russet chiffon with trails of flame-color and——”

“When the thing you really need is a good serge dress,” Julie broke in, with a little laugh.

“Zoe,” Maisie said, timidly, her mousy head bent over her mending, “do you suppose my millionaire will ever turn up again? You know I think he did sort of remember me.”

“I’m positive he will, Maisie. If in your heart you really want him, he will come. Things do happen that way.”

“Life has reduced itself now to the simple business of finding husbands,” Julie complained, “according to your new code, Zoe. I suppose you’d recommend it for me, too, even if I were to be another Bernhardt!”

Zoe refused to commit herself, but began wedging in her hats.

“At least, I don’t want you to take that horrible old Wagenstein person,” she assured her, at length. “You needn’t take him on my account, Julie. Oh, Julie, please—please come to Paris before you get engaged to him.”

“I don’t know about Paris, now,” Julie said, meditatively, “I’m rather interested in a new man now. Do you remember the one I smiled at the night at Mollat’s, when I broke off with Alphonse? The nice, ugly one I told you about? I ran into him the other day and—well, New York looks interesting for another six months.”

Zoe breathed a sigh of relief. If she and

Julie had to part—and it was hard parting with Julie!—it was comforting to know that Julie wasn't going to be snatched up by that leering old roué. She was sending Maisie to the *Vanity Box*. Christopher had suggested that Bellaire might have something interesting for her to do and was certain that the old gentleman would be entranced by Maisie's naïve sophistication. She was to have a larger salary, too, and certain bits of reporting to do, so that it looked as if Maisie was to have a career in spite of herself.

At dawn Julie dozed off, but Zoe could not think of sleep, even though her trunk was at last closed and her two bags locked. She dressed herself carefully. The outfit that she had bought on Fania's credit, to impress prospective employers, was to be her honeymoon costume. She was glad it was so becoming, but it didn't matter much. Christopher's love would make her beautiful in anything.

She heard the taxi down in front of the house before seven and wakened Julie as the man came in to get her luggage. Mrs. Horne, in a hideously flowered purple wrapper, her coarse, "touched" black hair in a knob on top of her head, and her nose red and twitching with excitement, came to the doorway.

"Dear, I'm so glad for you," she said, in her hoarse, early-morning voice. "As I always said to my girls, it's love that makes you happy—not another thing. Lots of them don't see it, dear,

but I'm glad you did. And about that money—just take your time, you know. I'm so glad you're going to take care of it yourself. It's much nicer than letting your new husband take it over. Not but what he'd be glad to, but—I'm really so glad, dear—so glad and happy.”

Zoe flung her arms about the lady, unheeding the cold cream which Mrs. Horne always had on as a charm against old age.

“I've learned so much here with you,” she whispered.

Mrs. Horne cleared her throat of emotion and hurried down the stairs after the trunk to make sure of its safety. Zoe and Julie were in each other's arms a moment.

“Isn't life queer, Zoe?” Julie said, crying a little. “We might have gone on like this together for years. Only one or the other of us would have been sure to go. Men spoil everything.”

“I want you to be happy, Julie,” Zoe said, brokenly. “You're so beautiful. You ought to have been a great actress. Perhaps if you worked a little harder——”

“I know, Zoe. But you can't work hard for something that you're not sure is going to make you happy. Do you know what I mean? I've failed, but I don't care because I don't think success would have made me much happier. It's just that sometimes you don't know what you want. You might have done the same thing,

Zoe, only—well, you knew from seeing the rest of us so discontented.”

Zoe kissed her silently.

“I’m going to keep on dancing around, though,” Julie said, “so don’t worry. If this new man doesn’t turn out to be my Christopher Kane, I’ll go to Paris. At least I know what I want now.”

Zoe rushed down the stairs and out into the crisp morning air. Christopher was waiting for her at the door of the taxi. He held out his arms and lifted her bodily into the taxicab.

“You’re sure there’s room for me on the steamer?” she demanded anxiously, as they started off.

“Foolish darling. It’s all fixed.” He pressed her hand. “In six minutes we’ll be on deck. Six—five—four——”

“Is it really true?” he said, his lips on hers. “Is the world really so gorgeous as this?”

Zoe rested her head, like a drowsy child, against his shoulder. Life was so simple.

THE END

